OLD!

THE ESSENTIAL GUIDE TO CLASSIC GAMES

retro GAMER

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THE A1200

THE MAKING OF ICO
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ALSO INSIDE
GOD OF WAR: CHAINS OF OLYMPUS
AMSTRAD ACTION #78
CASTLEVANIA: LEGACY OF DARKNESS
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NIGHTBREED
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EXCLUSIVE REPORT: REMAKING COMMODORE'S SUPER-CHARGED AMIGA FOR THE MODERN ERA

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HERO OF THE GOLDEN TALISMAN
BEHIND THE SCENES OF THE HIT C64 ACTION ADVENTURE

IN THE CHAIR: GAIL TILDEN
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THE RETROBATES

WHAT'S YOUR FAVOURITE AMIGA GAME?

DARRAN JONES

It's a cliché, but *Sensible World Of Soccer*. I'm no football fan, but it became impossible to put down.
Expertise: Juggling a gorgeous wife, two beautiful girls and an award-winning magazine, all under one roof!
Currently playing: *Castlevania Advance Collection*
Favourite game of all time: *Strider*

TIM EMPEY

There's so many to choose from, but I'm going to have to go with *Super Cars II*.
Expertise: Finishing Game Pass games before they go
Currently playing: *Final Fantasy VII Rebirth*
Favourite game of all time: *God Hand*

ANDY SALTER

Populous or *Speedball 2: Brutal Deluxe*.
Expertise: Modding games, no 'vanilla' versions for me, thanks!
Currently modding: *RTR: Imperium Surrectum*
Favourite game of all time: *Rome: Total War* although I guess it's the *Remastered* edition now

MARTYN CARROLL

The Secret Of Monkey Island. I played it at a friend's house and knew instantly that I needed an Amiga yesterday.
Expertise: Sinclair stuff
Currently playing: *Grand Theft Auto V*
Favourite game of all time: *Jet Set Willy*

RORY MILNE

The Amiga has so many great games, but *Uridium 2* is one that I always come back to. It stands toe to toe with the arcade shooters of its day, which is no mean feat.
Expertise: The game that I'm writing about at the time of writing
Currently playing: *Quake III Arena*
Favourite game of all time: *Tempest*

ANDREW FISHER

Pinball Fantasies improved on the original with four very playable tables.
Expertise: Forty years of gaming, from Commodore 64 to Switch
Currently playing: *Black Tiger*
Favourite game of all time: *Wizball*

PAUL ROSE

My favourite Amiga game is easily *Lemmings*.
Expertise: Winging it
Currently playing: *Star Wars Outlaws*
Favourite game of all time: *Half-Life 2*

DAVID CROOKES

I still play *Sensible World Of Soccer* today and I love the purity of it compared to modern football games.
Expertise: Amstrad, Lynx, adventures, *Dizzy* and PlayStation 2 (but is it retro? Debate!)
Currently playing: *Lemmings*
Favourite game of all time: *Broken Sword*

LOADING...

The original Amiga 1200 was cruelly cut down before it could reach its prime. Despite being compatible with a huge number of older Amiga games and being a notable upgrade over Commodore's earlier home micros in its popular line, it couldn't weather the bankruptcy of Commodore and was eventually discontinued in 1996.

Thankfully, the story of Commodore's computer doesn't end there though as Retro Games Ltd is not only bringing it back, it has also modernised it in several exciting ways and is even packaging it with a bunch of classic games. You can read about its revival on page 22 as Martyn was able to quiz both Darren Melbourne and Chris Smith after having extensive hands-on time with the incoming system.

Outside of our exclusive THEA1200 coverage you'll find behind-the-scenes retrospectives on *Ico*, *Star Wars Episode 1: Racer* and *Azrael's Tear*, Ultimate Guides on *Disney's Aladdin* and Hideo Kojima's *Metal Gear Solid 4* and a fascinating chat with Gail Tilden about her time at Nintendo Of America and working on *Nintendo Power*.

There's plenty more to enjoy, including reviews of *Silent Hill: Townfall* and new compilations from M2 and Digital Eclipse, all your favourite columnists and popular regulars like Homebrew, Gaming Grails and Covermount Corner. Oh, and don't miss out on our fantastic subs offer on page 32 where you can gain access to a huge number of back issues for as long as your sub stays running.

Stay safe and enjoy the magazine.

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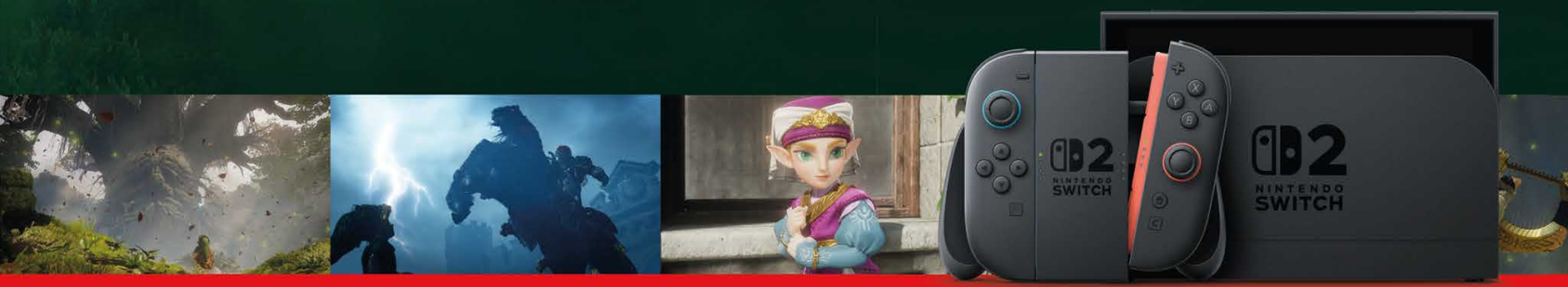


ONLY FOR NINTENDO SWITCH 2

Nintendo

CONTENTS

>> Load 291 Breathing new life into classic games

RETRO RADAR

8 Main News
All the latest news from the Tokyo Game Show and Nintendo's Direct

10 Mike Mika
Mike begins a story about how Digital Eclipse made *Final Fight* for Capcom

11 News Wall
We pay tribute to two gaming legends

12 Iain Lee
If you've ever struggled with technology then this column is for you

14 Mr Biffo
Paul makes a case for classic games that deserve more love

16 A Moment With
Philip Oliver discusses a new project, the return of Dizzy and AI tools

18 Back To Back To The Eighties
Martyn loves travelling through time and he's currently visiting June 1980

REVIVALS

20 Hyper Sports
Darran recalls how watching kids battle against each other on *First Class* led to him starting his own digital competition with a friend

48 Nightbreed: The Interactive Movie
Martyn looks back at this ambitious horror adaptation by Ocean Software, that didn't quite capture his attention like the movie did

72 Vampire Savior: The Lord Of Vampire
If you're looking for a great Saturn beat-'em-up, Darran recommends you give this one a try

88 Freedom Fighters
Tim recalls how his first review for *Cube* was getting to play IO Interactive's inventive squad-based action game

112 God Of War: Chains Of Olympus
The PSP may have had a tiny screen compared to a TV, but Darran soon learned that it could still pull off games that required an epic sense of scale

50

FEATURED

40 Covermount Corner: Amstrad Action #78
James Konik has been enjoying Gremlin's *Space Crusade* demo and playing through *Shockway Rider*

50 The Making Of: Azrael's Tear
Richard C Hewison speaks to the creatives behind this ambitious first-person PC game that saw gamers questing for the Holy Grail

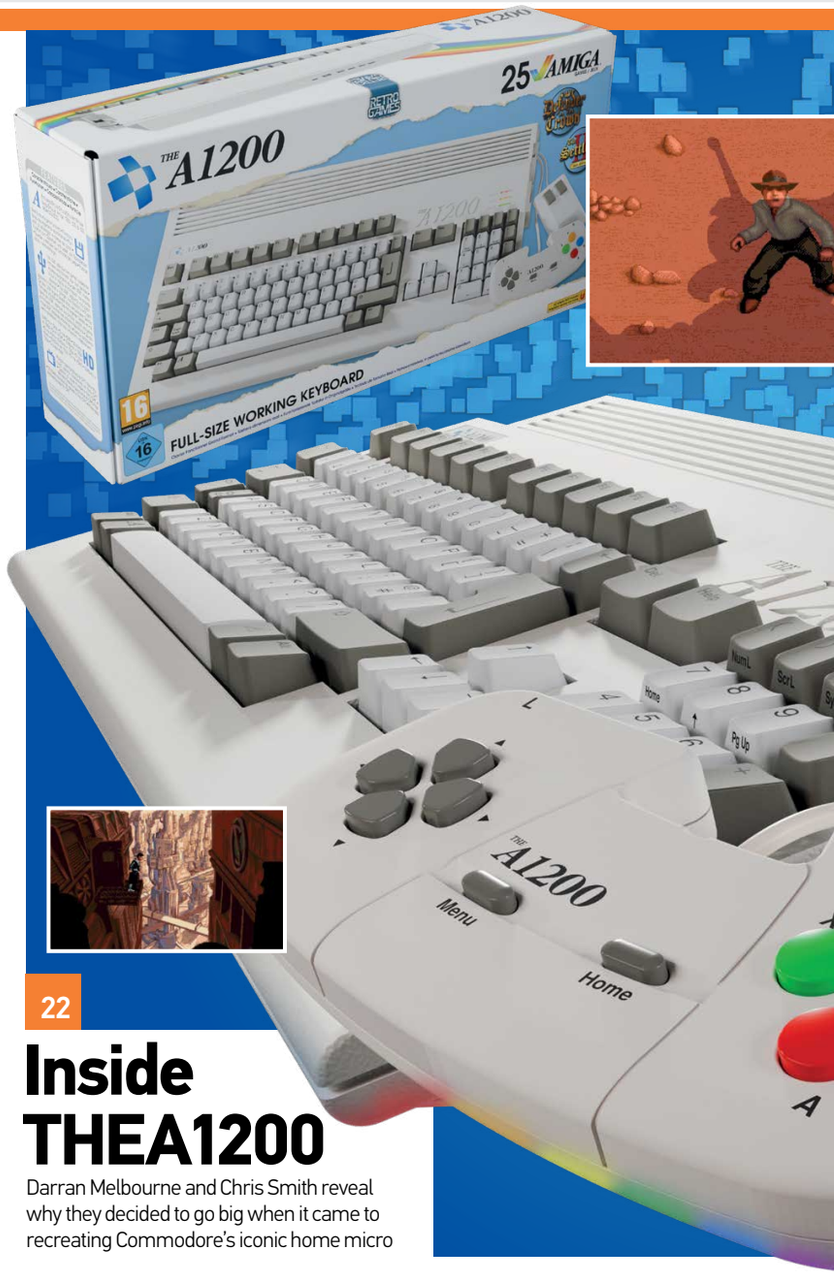
56 The Evolution Of: Star Wars Episode 1: Racer
Rory Milne speaks to the visionaries behind the original N64 racing game, its arcade counterpart, the PS2 sequel and the recently released *Galactic Racer*

74 Ultimate Guide: Metal Gear Solid 4: Guns Of The Patriots
We send Samuel Roberts on a mission to replay Hideo Kojima's ambitious PS3 stealth game. He returns from behind enemy lines with quite the story to tell

80 Why You Must Play: Virtual Boy Wario Land
Martyn explains why there has never been a better time to discover one of the Virtual Boy's greatest games

82 In The Chair: Gail Tilden
James Tocchio quizzes the ex-editor of *Nintendo Power* about the popular US magazine and what it was like spending several decades at Nintendo Of America

74



22

Inside THEA1200
Darran Melbourne and Chris Smith reveal why they decided to go big when it came to recreating Commodore's iconic home micro

34

The Making Of: Hero Of The Golden Talisman
Shaun Southern on how *Impossible Mission* inspired his budget adventure game

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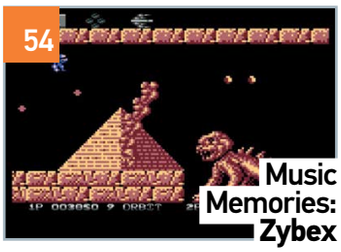
64

The Making Of: Ico

Fumito Ueda and Shuhei Yoshida return to Team Ico's acclaimed videogame



54

Music Memories: Zybex

REVIEWS

90 Silent Hill: Townfall

92 Toaplan Arcade Garage: Flying Fire Shark

94 Disney/Pixar Toy Story: Retro Roundup!

94 SiN Reloaded

94 Orc Incremental

94 Evercade: Visco Arcade 2

ESSENTIALS

96 **Homebrew**
Andrew Fisher is back with more news and reviews from the scene

100 **Hot Topic: Metal Gear Memories**
The team revisit the hit stealth series

102 **Collector's Corner**
Prepare for another lovely collection that may well make you envious

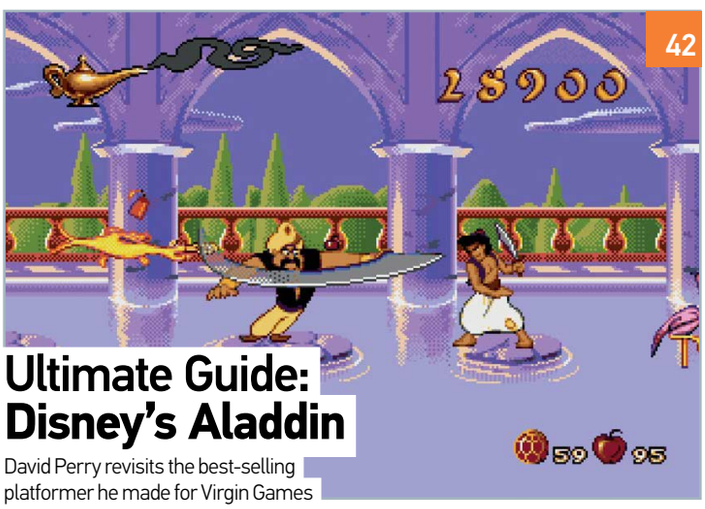
104 **Gaming Grails: Castlevania: Legacy Of Darkness**
Darran makes a case for Konami's second 3D N64 *Castlevania* game

106 **My Retro Life**
Martyn discusses his recent trip to the birthplace of Lara Croft

108 **Mailbag**
Who'll be the Star Letter?

111 **Next Month**
Will you guess what makes next issue's cover?

114 **Endgame**
Martyn finishes another game for you



42

Ultimate Guide: Disney's Aladdin

David Perry revisits the best-selling platformer he made for Virgin Games

» [Switch 2] We can't wait to return to Hyrule, even if the character designs are leaving us a little cold.

CONTENTS

8 NINTENDO GETS DIRECT
Darran looks at the highlights of Nintendo's show, including *Ocarina Of Time* and *Metroid Ravenous*

10 MIKE MIKA
This month is part one of a story that looks at how Digital Eclipse worked on Capcom's *Final Fight*

11 NEWS WALL
We pay tribute to Martin Wheeler and David Bone Gill who worked on a bunch of classic games

12 IAIN LEE
Do you struggle to do the simplest technological things? Iain certainly does

14 MR BIFFO
Are you a fan of *Mirror's Edge*? Paul is and there are other games he wants to champion

16 A MOMENT WITH
Philip Oliver chats to us about the return of *Dizzy* and a brand-new paper-based kickstarter

18 BACK TO BACK TO THE EIGHTIES
Martyn has the keys to the DeLorean and he's flying back to 1980. Next stop: June

NINTENDO GETS DIRECT

All the retro news from Nintendo and the Tokyo Game Show

Words by Darran Jones

Nintendo has become infamous for dropping its Direct shows with very little notice and this one was no different. Despite a bunch of interesting announcements, the main focus was an extensive look at the long-rumoured remake of *The Legend Of Zelda: Ocarina Of Time*, as well as *Metroid Ravenous*, a direct sequel to the excellent 2021 game *Metroid Dread*.

Ocarina Of Time focussed on gameplay and it's looking very, very good indeed. We're not fully sold on the art direction of the characters, particularly young Link, or the fact that most of them are voice-acted now but there's no denying that the world of Hyrule looks absolutely stunning. The inclusion of voices is interesting and so far there's been no word if Link will talk this time around. We hope he won't, but seeing the live-action film is dropping next year, we can't believe he'll be mute in that and Nintendo might be considering consistency across its media.

Voice concerns aside, the game itself is looking great. As much as we love *Breath Of The Wild* and *Tears Of The Kingdom*, we did miss the expansive dungeons of the earlier games and some of the best can be found in *Ocarina Of Time* (Water Temple aside of course). Mechanically, the game is promising numerous improvements, including the ability to run, button-based jumping, full camera control, item scrolling and numerous other tweaks. Combat looks like it has been suitably improved over the original game as well, while Hyrule Castle Town is fully explorable, unlike the original N64 release. Expect a review very soon.

Metroid Ravenous is the next big game from Nintendo and is planned for January 2027. The game is once again being handled by MercurySteam and Nintendo EPD and it features many of the mechanics from *Dread*, including its parry attack. The gameplay shown so far suggests there won't be as many stealth sections as before, but the game does appear to be going big on boss battles again, so expect plenty of epic scraps. One other thing of interest is that it looks like Samus will be able to feed on her victims (and possibly steal their abilities in the process?) which is where the name *Ravenous* comes from. We'd imagine more news about how the game will play will drop ahead of its January launch.

Other news from the show included the reveal of *Kirby And The World Beyond*, which is the follow-up to the excellent *Kirby And The Forgotten Land*. Frustratingly, the trailer gives very little away other than a world existing beyond Kirby's cute paradise and that the crazy transformation abilities of *Forgotten Land* don't appear to be returning.

Other highlights included an updated version of *Hyrule Warriors: Age Of Calamity*, a new

» [Switch 2] We really enjoyed *Metroid Dread* and this looks like it's going to cause Samus more intense pain.

» [PC] We were delighted with Kirby's first outing in proper 3D, so here's hoping that *The World Beyond* is just as good.

» [PC] *Toxic Frontier* is another roguelike and another with a distinctive, pixel-art theme

» [PC] New levels set in Japan seemed appropriate for *Crazy Taxi: Word Tour*'s Tokyo Game Show update.

Professor Layton game and that *Monster Hunter Wilds*, several *Persona* games and various *Resident Evil* games would all be heading to the Switch 2.

While the Tokyo Game Show took place recently, it was a surprisingly muted affair when it came to retro gaming, not helped by the fact that the final day had to be cancelled due to an approaching typhoon. *Persona 4 Revival* was shown off, Japan was revealed as one of the locations featured in *Crazy Taxi: World Tour*, while there was a brand-new trailer for the incoming *Call Of Duty: Modern Warfare 4*. The long-gestating *Bloodstained: The Scarlet Engagement* was also on show and is looking excellent. The game has sadly been delayed until 2027, but it promises to be a significant improvement over the original game, which was one of the big early Kickstarter successes when it launched on the platform in 2017. *Lollipop Chainsaw 2: Back2Back* was also on show, although original writer James Gunn and director Suda51 don't appear to be attached to the project.

» [PC] It feels like we've been waiting for the *Bloodstained* sequel for an age, but we're confident it will be worth the wait

> "Metroid Ravenous is the next big game from Nintendo and is planned for January 2027"

PC Gamer's PC Gaming Show revealed that *Lufia 1 & 2 The Sinstrals Saga* will be getting an update for all modern systems, and that Nightdive Studios is working on a brand-new remaster of *Thief: The Dark Project*. The strategy RPG *Toxic Frontier* is also looking pretty sweet thanks to some gorgeous 2D pixel art and some fun card-based mechanics. *Tenebris Somnia* also piqued our attention due to it blending 2D graphics and live-action cutscenes with a survival horror theme.

Other high points of the PC Gaming Show included *Neon Abyss 2* which is looking just as manic and chaotic as the original game, with great pixel art and cooperative play, while the excellent *Ball X Pit* has a new expansion on the way in November, which is filled with content.

Nintendo was clearly the winner of the two shows, but both events have plenty of games to look forward to in the coming months. Expect reviews in later issues. *

AES+ GETS DELAYED

Those who were eagerly waiting for PLAION's NEOGEO AES+ will be disappointed to learn that the console has now been delayed by a year, a move that has seen some cancel their preorders. In a recent interview with VGC, Ben Jones revealed that the entire project was almost cancelled due to the required chips needed to complete the console being unavailable. The team has now found a solution, but it means a significant delay. We'll hopefully have more news on what's been happening behind the scenes in our next issue. While the news has upset some, the machine was shown off at Tokyo Game Show and early responses from visitors there suggest it's performing exactly as PLAION promised. The incoming version of *Zero Wing* was also shown on the device. The console is now planned to debut 16 September 2027, with PLAION offering a free Gamepad and a 30% off voucher for early adopters who have decided to keep their preorders.

Who is Mike Mika?
Mike Mika's official videogame career began in the Nineties, working on Game Boy Color titles like *Klax* and *Alice In Wonderland*. He's now the studio head of Digital Eclipse, a studio acclaimed for its reverential treatment of classic games.

Cracking Capcom's Final Fight – part 1

In the early Noughties, emulation felt a little like a magic trick. Few people understood what it was, let alone how it actually worked. Today, collections of old games that get released are assumed to be emulated. Back then, if you wanted to release an old game on new hardware, you needed the source code to port it, or you remade it.

Emulation was something freakishly smart people did, mostly in the darker areas of the internet. Commercially, it had a reputation for being slow or inaccurate. There was also another problem that needed to be considered: piracy.

For most companies, emulation and piracy were practically the same word. Part of our job was convincing publishers that the technology wasn't illegal. To them, it enabled people to play games distributed without their consent, on platforms where they actively sold games, like the PC.

At Digital Eclipse, emulation was the beating heart of our operation. Our Vancouver studio, led by Jeff Vavasour, had become remarkably good at it. Emulation engineers are a unique breed. They like impossible problems. Jeff was an emulation genius who seemed permanently stressed, with no end to the projects coming his way.

By then, we'd made a name for ourselves bringing old American arcade games back, particularly for Atari and Midway. Hits like *Gauntlet*, *Robotron: 2084*, *Defender* and many others. But the great Japanese libraries were still largely closed to us.

I was managing our San Francisco studio, and we wanted to prove that we could handle emulation projects as well. I also wanted to help Jeff out. More specifically, we saw an opportunity with Capcom.

We loved Capcom's games and were enormous fans of *Capcom Generations*, which had been released on the PlayStation and Saturn and covered everything from the *19XX* series to *Street Fighter* and *Ghosts 'N Goblins*. What impressed us was how they presented their older games. They treated them with reverence.

People at Capcom liked us and our work. But liking us and trusting us with their history were different things. Before we could go any deeper, they wanted to see if we could deliver an arcade-perfect version of *Final Fight*.

It was a cruel ask.

Final Fight came out in 1989, so the hardware was only about 15 years old. People had been trying to bring it home for almost that entire time. The Super Nintendo version lost Guy, two-player play and an entire stage. *Final Fight Guy* solved the missing-Guy problem by removing Cody, which was certainly one solution. The Sega CD got closer. Ironically, one of the best versions was *Final Fight One* on the Game Boy Advance. But it was still a translation.

Players wanted the arcade game. Capcom challenged us to deliver. We weren't recreating *Final Fight*. We were recreating the hardware.

If we got the machine right, the original ROM would wake up believing it was inside the arcade cabinet.

Capcom knew better than anyone where previous attempts had failed, and they weren't going to tell us. We just had to make *Final Fight* work.

Around this time, we met Capcom USA president Hiroshi Tobisawa for lunch at a hotel near their offices and that's where we saw our chance. And I'll share what happened with you next month. *

> "People at Capcom liked us and our work. But liking us and trusting us with their history were different things"

Do you agree with Mike's thoughts? Contact us at:

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LOST LEGENDS

RETRO GAMER PAYS TRIBUTE TO MARTIN WHEELER AND DAVID BONE GILL

The games community was recently hit with the news that Martin Wheeler and David Bone Gill, have passed away. Both men have worked in the industry for years and across a variety of classic games, from *Dan Dare* to *Wetrix* and the news of their passing has dominated social media.

Martin Wheeler passed away in September, aged 57. Many readers will be familiar with Martin's work. He began programming in 1982, on a Sinclair ZX81, and two years later became one of the Gang Of Five – the in-house development team at Virgin Games that created the *Dan Dare* and *Action Force* games. Martin specialised in graphics, but he also created the early Virgin hit *Sorcery*, and in the Nineties had a hand in multiple Game Boy projects including *Terminator 2* and *Spider-Man 3*. More recently he split his time between running York-based developer Recluse Industries and producing music under the stage name Vector Lovers. He was also a long-standing member of Game Republic, championing the games industry in the North Of England.

» Young Martin, pictured in 1987, during his days at Virgin Games.

» David Bone Gill started work at Software Creations where he worked on games such as *Tin Star*, before moving to companies like Bizarre Creations and Cloud Imperium.

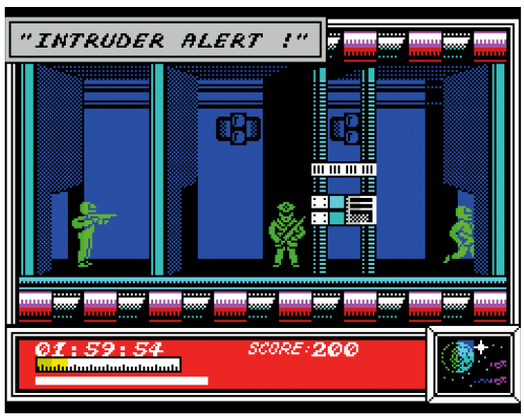
Jas Austin worked alongside Martin at BITS Studios in the early Nineties and remembers him warmly. "We became firm friends over our love of videogames, music and the odd pint or two," he tells us. "After the BITS days we managed to meet up and kept in touch online until near the end. He was a lovely person, a hugely talented game developer and an accomplished musician. Martin, you will be missed."

David Bone Gill also passed in September after losing his battle against cancer. He was 51. David started off his gaming career at Software Creations as a tester, but he soon moved over to programming games. Although a *Barbie* game that David worked on was cancelled, *Tin Star*, his next game, did get released and was followed by PlayStation and N64 titles like *Wetrix* and its follow-up *Aqua Aqua* before he left to work at studios like Bizarre Creations and, most recently, Cloud Imperium. Chun Wah Kong who worked with David at Software Creations and was a good friend spoke about the loss on social media saying, "It has been my honour and privilege to have had you as a friend for the last 30+ years. I will always look back fondly of our time together. It doesn't seem real you're no longer with us. I feel I could ask you what it's like being dead and you'd do your shrug and say, "Ey? Dead innit?!"

Bizarre Creations' Martyn Chudley reached out to tell us about the sad news. Martyn worked with David when he was at Bizarre Creations and he shared the following with us from him and his wife Sarah, who also worked at Bizarre. "Bone was a great guy and an utter asset to Bizarre, working on the UI/UX for all of our later games. If you see it on-screen, he would have had a hand in creating it! He had a wicked and infectious sense of humour, while having to put up with health issues that others did not. As creative director I have extremely fond memories of working closely alongside him – his talent and passion were second to none."

Martyn also passed on a tribute by Vincent Shayer, another ex-member of Bizarre who recalls an encounter with David and a can of beans, saying "That one-syllable laugh he did was infectious." Our thoughts go out to the friends and family of both Martin and David in this very difficult time. ✱

» [SNES] *Tin Star* is the first game David worked on that was released. It's one of the few good games to make use of the Super Scope.



» [ZX Spectrum] Martin created the striking visual style for the *Dan Dare* games at Virgin.

» The collection features Matt Smith's three Spectrum games packaged in a premium box.

MATTHEW GOES MINING

The Matthew Smith Collection is a new boxset by Pixel Jockey. The new collection features Matt's three Spectrum games: *Styx*, *Manic Miner* and *Jet Set Willy* and each will be released on a physical cassette tape. The collection doubled its Kickstarter £14.5k funding goal in its first 24 hours.

Alongside the game comes a new book, *Matthew Smith: Mining For Success*, written by Kat Powell and produced by Retro Fusion Books. The 200-page A5-sized book will delve into Matt's early life and later success as a teenage coding prodigy. It's not clear if Matt had been interviewed for the book, but we do know he will benefit financially from the project. Matt has been involved in some questionable deals in the past, so it's pleasing to hear that he will receive a share of the profits. If you missed the Kickstarter you can order the collection at pixeljockey.co.uk

» [ZX Spectrum] Matt's often overlooked debut *Styx* is one of the three games offered.

Who is Iain Lee?
Iain Lee is a freelance counsellor who loves gaming, particularly retro gaming. You can get more information about Iain by visiting iainleecounselling.com or heading over to patreon.com/iainandKatherine

Alright grandad?

I spent way too long yesterday setting up this thing called Plex so that I can stream movies and TV shows stored on my computer to both my telephone and television. I found it incredibly difficult, even with walkthroughs on YouTube and some help from Gemini. This was way beyond my ken, and there was a lot of huffing, puffing and bad language.

Eventually I got it to work. Kinda. When I went to my partner's house to show off what I'd done and then leisurely watch the *Man About The House* movie (that was seriously the first film I installed) it didn't work. Cue a lot more Binging and I worked it out – I had let my PC go to sleep, and it wouldn't work.

I am fully aware that the way I have written that makes me sound like a very old man completely out of his depth. And do you know why? It's because I AM a very old man completely out of my depth. I'm 53 and accepted a long time ago that the world has rushed past me at a pace I could never keep up with. I have to get my kids to show me how things work. In fact, I had to get the person working on the till in Lidl to show me how to use my newly installed loyalty card last week. As she was doing it, I swore and said, "I'm an old man, aren't I?" She smiled politely but didn't correct me.

I always thought I was in touch with stuff like this. When I was ten, I was the only person in my house that could set the timer on the video recorder. The number of times I was asked to set our Betamax machine (better quality than VHS) to record *EastEnders* or *The Guns Of Navarone*. Thing is, my parents at that time would have been 32. Babies!

I had the same blank stare when using my Dragon 32 or BBC Micro. They had zero idea what I was doing. I might as well have been conjuring demons from another dimension as I typed CLOAD"" and then pressed play on the tape recorder. It's the natural order of things. Kids can do stuff parents can't and then we pass the baton as we get older.

I mentioned Binging. To Bing instead of to Google. Years ago, I hosted a pub quiz for Microsoft. I told the crowd they were not allowed to Google any of the answers. I noticed the people that booked me looked really angry. They beckoned me off stage and whispered quite aggressively, "Don't mention Google. Go back and tell them they can't Bing the answers." I thought that was kind of cute. Actual Microsoft was talking like a confused old man who thought they were hip with technology when by thinking that anybody in the world was using Bing as a search engine, they were showing how hopelessly out of touch they were. Ah, bless. Same as it ever was. ✱

> "When I was ten, I was the only person in my house that could set the timer on the video recorder"

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the 7th Guest

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TRILOBYTE GAMES

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Who is Paul Rose?
Paul is probably better known as Mr Biffo – the creator of legendary teletext games magazine *Digitiser*. These days, he mostly writes his videogame ramblings over at Digitiser2000.com. If you want more Biffo in your eyes, you can catch him as the host of *Digitizer The Show* at www.bit.ly/biffo2000.

Overlooked but not forgotten

What are the biggest overlooked gems in gaming history? Not necessarily obscure games. I mean the ones people did play, then told you were flawed for exactly the same reasons you loved them.

The first two that spring to mind for me are *Mirror's Edge* and *Eternal Darkness*. They couldn't be more different, but both took a risk I wish more games had taken.

Mirror's Edge arrived in 2008 to good reviews but modest sales. It let you run, leap and scramble across rooftops in a world that was stark and bright. Some people found it too short, too linear, too frustrating when the running gave way to combat. But it wasn't a shooting game. It was a parkour sim, and I always just wanted to get back to the running. For me, few games have matched the thrill of finding a route through that city and somehow pulling it off without breaking stride. It got a reboot in 2016, *Mirror's Edge Catalyst*, but giving Faith a bigger world somehow made the experience feel smaller.

Then there's 2002's *Eternal Darkness: Sanity's Requiem*. Developed by Silicon Knights and published by Nintendo, this GameCube horror game earned superb reviews and dismal sales. Its famous 'sanity effects' appeared to make your telly or console malfunction. People I've spoken to over the years found those tricks annoying. I thought they were brilliant. Most horror games try to convince you that the character is losing their mind. *Eternal Darkness* briefly made you wonder whether something was wrong in your own living room. How is that anything other than genius?

I've also spent years defending the original Sega Saturn port of *Daytona USA*. It had the misfortune of being judged alongside the PlayStation version of *Ridge Racer*, which looked vastly more polished. Yes, *Daytona* had pop-up. Yes, it was shonky. But it played better, and it had three distinct courses where *Ridge Racer* kept sending me round variations of the same one. *Ridge Racer* showed off the PlayStation's power, yet always felt weirdly claustrophobic. *Daytona* gave me huge tracks, open skies and the giddy sensation of throwing a car into a corner at speed.

Sticking with Sega, I was bewildered by the number of people who seemed to dismiss *Comix Zone* towards the end of the Mega Drive's life. At heart, yes, it's a fairly straightforward beat-'em-up. But it unfolds inside the panels of a comic book and wrings every last drop of fun out of the idea. I'll happily take that over another game where you walk right, fight some guys, fight a guy on a motorbike, fight a guy with a chain, kick over an oil drum and eat a roast chicken you found on the pavement…

And then there's 2012's *Spec Ops: The Line*. On the surface, it looked like another military shooter. The further you went, the more it turned that genre against itself, confronting you with the horror behind the spectacle. Some of its images have stayed with me longer than scenes from games that sold ten times as many copies. Perhaps players went in expecting a power fantasy and found something that made them uncomfortable instead. That discomfort is exactly why it deserved better.

Maybe that's the common thread. These games weren't overlooked because they had nothing to offer. They offered something unusual, and paid a price for it. Which games are you still defending when everyone else has moved on? *

> "It was a parkour sim, and I always just wanted to get back to the running"

Do you agree with Paul's thoughts? Contact us at:

RetroGamerUK | retrogamermag.bsky.social | @RetroGamer_Mag | retrogamer@futurenet.com

NUTMEG!

Playable Demo!

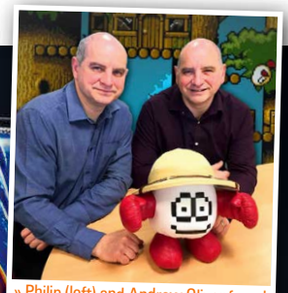
NOSTALGIC FOOTBALL MANAGER GAME FOR PC

STEAM

SUMO DIGITAL

SECRET MODE

» Here's a mock-up image of what a Mega Drive cartridge for *Go! Dizzy Go!* might look like.



» Philip (left) and Andrew Oliver found huge success in the late-Eighties and early Nineties with *Dizzy*.

Philip Oliver

The legendary game developer on the return of Dizzy, AI tools and a brand-new project

Words by Darran Jones

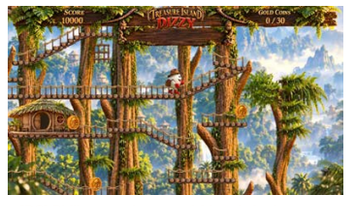
Philip Oliver has spent an impressive 45 years in the game industry and worked on everything from *Dizzy* to *Pac-Man* games. Here he tells us about a brand-new project and the return of his eggshellent adventurer.

So what drove the creation of *Journey To The Emerald City*?
When Facebook banned the under 12s from creating accounts there was loads of talk about kids and [limiting their] screen time. That led me to think, "I wonder if you could do a videogame but without a screen." After mulling it over I started thinking of an interactive book, but you could make it more than that by having an inventory, including dice and other things. It's kind of like a *Dizzy* game in the fact that the decisions are made by what you find.

And where does the physical aspect come in?
I told Andrew that we needed to make it collectible. So anyway, I went away and did some design to see what I could get inside a DVD-sized box and see what kind of experience I could make. When you open the box there's an activity pad with loads of games, all themed to the Emerald City with beautiful graphics, created with AI tools, but led by humans. It will also include Inventory cards that can be used in a variety of ways, including additional games like a collecting game and a *Top Trumps*-style game.

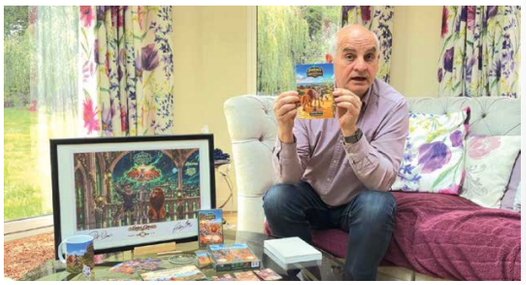
***Emerald City* is on Kickstarter. What have you learned since your *Dizzy* Kickstarter, which didn't make its target?**
We asked a lot of money for that original target, because videogames were expensive to make. We estimated inside Blitz that it was going to cost us £200,000 or £300,000 to make, because it was going to be a 3D world and it was going to be a big game. The economics, largely due to AI tools, have changed. If we had to make all this content and all of the imagery that goes with this, you'd be at £50,000 plus easily. But as we are using AI tools we can drop those costs right down to a Kickstarter target like £5,000.

On the subject of AI, a lot of retro franchises like *Manic Miner* and *James Pond* have come under fire for using AI in their promotion. How will your



» [PC] Philip sees the use of AI tools in the new *Dizzy* game as simply another tool which is used to make the creative process easier.

» Philip says *Journey To The Emerald City* wouldn't have been possible to make with the use of AI tools.



» The Kickstarter for *Journey To The Emerald City* is up now with a budget of £5,000.

» There are a large number of locations you can visit in *Journey To The Emerald City.*

projects use AI and what do you say to those that don't want AI or AI Tools?
We understand some people dont want developers to use AI tools to reduce time and cost and that's ok and a personal choice. With just me and Andrew working on it, we'd have to schedule at least a year. We're not committing to that, it's just not going to happen. Whereas this way it can happen. Many years ago, we set ourselves the goal of a game a month, as you can stay enthusiastic about an idea for a month. When it drags into six months or a year, it's miserable. God knows how the people at *Grand Theft Auto VI* manage to deal with it. The thing is, this is just another tool and there's lots of things I liken it to. In the early days, if you'd have asked me to write a *Dizzy* game where I had to convert assembler into hex codes, would I have done it? No. I got a compiler to do that for me. This is just the next evolution of tools. If you can do stuff that could never have been justified before, then that's a good use. I could never have justified any of this Active Brain stuff before, whereas now I can.

> "We can make new Dizzy games with a royalty going back to Codemasters"
>
> **PHILIP OLIVER**

So tell us about the new Dizzy deal with Codemasters.
Well they would absolutely not talk about IP ownership, but they have agreed that we can make new *Dizzy* games with a royalty going back to Codemasters. We can make new games, no questions asked, and hopefully, something like *Treasure Island Dizzy*, as long as it's on a brand-new platform and a new imagining of it, as that counts as a new game.

So will this be a 3D game or will you be making a more traditional 2D adventure?
That's the thinking in the last week, although I won't say that it's 100% developed. I think by the time we get to Blackpool, we're going to have to show something. So Andrew is working on that this week. His project for this week is to do a proper visualisation of what the first *Dizzy* game turns out to look like. I'm also keen that it comes in a box, with stickers, a poster and everything else.

Do you still have any *Dizzy* games in the archives?
We are sitting on a few. We've got *Dizzy The Adventurer*, *Go! Dizzy Go!* and *Panic Dizzy* on the Mega Drive. We also did a version of *Fast Food* for Fuse for the Switch, so we might put that on the Mega Drive as well. Then there's obviously an Evercade cartridge that can come off the back of that eventually, but I think it'd be quite nice to do it as a boxed product with a real Mega Drive cartridge inside. ✱

***Journey To The Emerald City* is on Kickstarter. Find it at bit.ly/Kickstarter_emerald**

» [PC] Here's how a new version of *Treasure Island Dizzy* might look on modern systems.

» [Mega Drive] The Olivers have a number of *Dizzy* games that never saw the light of day.

» [Mega Drive] *Dizzy The Adventurer* is a fun *Dizzy* game we'd love to play on the Mega Drive.

BACK TO THE EIGHTIES

JUNE 1980 – The Golden Age of arcade videogames is well and truly here. Pac-Man debuted last month and now Atari launches a trackball classic inspired by Cold War anxiety…

THE MONTH'S HIGHLIGHTS

IN THE WORLD

News In Brief

CNN hits TV screens in the US, becoming the world's first 24-hour news channel. The 1980 UEFA European Football Championship kicks off in Italy; West Germany are the eventual winners. Tim Berners-Lee begins work on ENQUIRE, a forerunner to the World Wide Web.

IN THE CHARTS

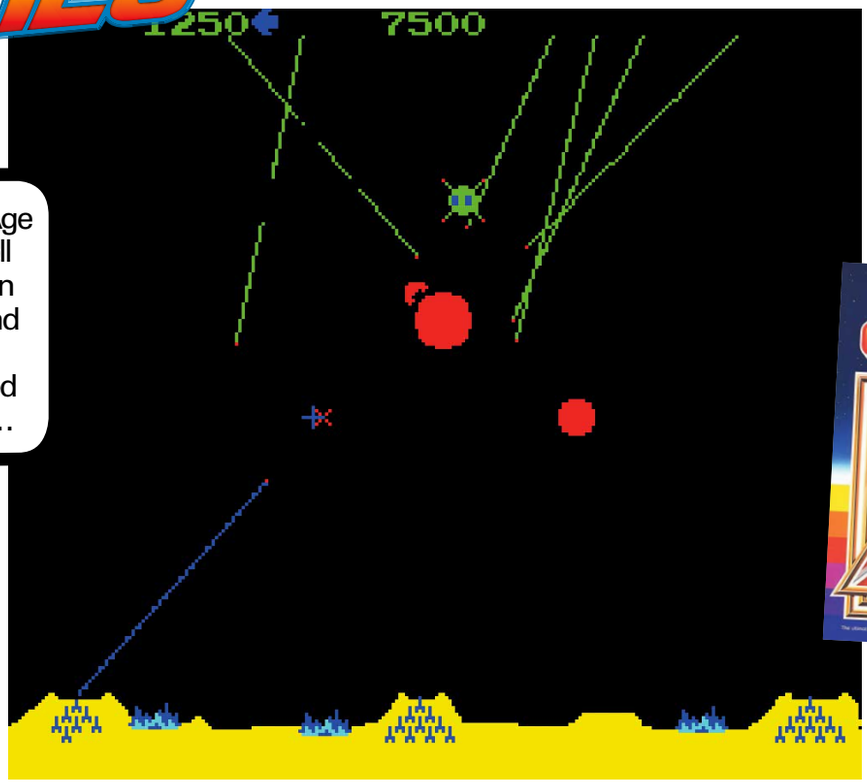
Don's Sob Story

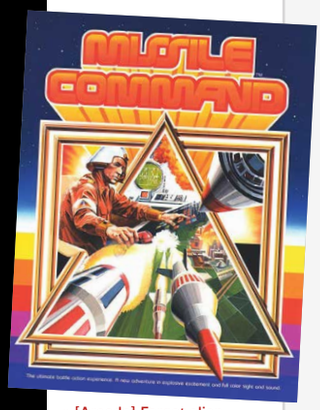
The Theme From MASH (Suicide Is Painless) is knocked off the top of the singles chart by Don McLean's *Crying*. The cover of the old Roy Orbison hit spends three weeks at number one. New long-players arrive from Queen (*The Game*) and The Rolling Stones (*Emotional Rescue*).

IN THE CINEMA

The Force Is Strong

The Empire Strikes Back tightens its Force choke on the UK box office, topping the chart throughout June. It will eventually gross more than £11m in its initial run. The low-budget slasher *Friday The 13th* surprises many, becoming the second biggest earner of the month.





» [Arcade] Forget alien invaders: in *Missile Command*, you must protect the population from a superpower's nuclear bombardment.

JUNE 1980

Atari pushes the button and Commodore unveils VIC

The big news this month is the arrival of *Missile Command* in North American arcades. Atari's new coin-op is a product of the late Cold War phase, turning the fear of existential nuclear threat into a frantic shooter where players use a trackball to shoot down the missiles targeting the cities below. The game was designed by Dave Theurer, who had previously developed *Atari Football*. This was very different subject matter, however, and Dave had reservations about some elements of the initial design. The compromise reached was to remove the names of the warring sides and the cities that were under threat. The end result is that players might be protecting bases on a distant moon, but the experience is still a sobering one – particularly as the traditional 'game over' screen features a searing explosion overlaid with two stark words "THE END".

» After debuting at the 1980 Summer CES show, Commodore's new machine will be released worldwide in 1982 as the VIC-20.

We all lose, it seems, but Atari is onto another winner with *Missile Command*. It commences one of its biggest production runs to date, building more than 18,500 units in a variety of configurations. The game becomes a hit and later gains status as one of the greatest videogames ever created. It will also make an impact outside of the arcades, beginning with a lucrative version for the Atari 2600 released in 1981.

Also happening this month in Chicago is the Consumer Electronic Show, where Commodore is making preparations to start a war of its own. Two months prior, Commodore boss Jack Tramiel had demanded that his engineers come up with a low-cost colour computer that would swat away these silly little machines that were coming out of Europe, like the Sinclair ZX80 and the Acorn Atom. The result is the MicroPET, named after Commodore's current flagship computer. After debuting at the show, the computer will be renamed VIC after its innovative display hardware, the Video Interface Chip. The machine proper won't appear until later in the year, and then initially only in Japan, but it will soon become proof of concept for Uncle Jack's philosophy of, "Computers for the masses, not the classes." *

OTHER HIGHLIGHTS OF JUNE 1980

Asteroids Triple Threat

Asteroids may have floundered in Japan, but in the US it continues to thrust ahead. The latest issue of *Coin Connection* reports that Atari's big earner is now available in three different formats: standard upright, cocktail and the new 'cabaret' model – a smaller upright variant where the monitor lies almost flat, so that players peer down into the action.

The Price Of Progress

The latest issue of US tech bible *Byte* reminds us that buying computer hardware requires some very deep pockets. Apple disagrees, naturally, claiming that its $2,500 Apple II and disk drive combo is "downright affordable". Elsewhere in this issue of the popular magazine, NorthStar is advertising its new 18MB hard drive, available for $4,999. That works out at £277 per megabyte. Better stick to floppies.

Tandy Benchtest

The June issue of *Personal Computer World* leads with a review of the Tandy TRS-80 Model II. The new integrated machine is aimed at business users and this is reflected in the price (£2,299 for the 32K model). "The Model II is an attractive, well designed computer," comments the mag. "I doubt that many will be sold for domestic or educational use…"

We Want Raiders

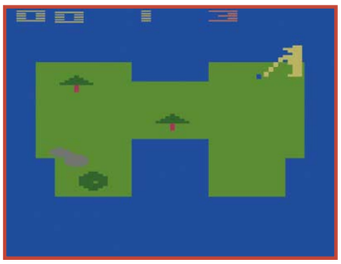
Compute shares an anecdote from the recent West Coast Computer Faire, held in San Francisco. Reps had set up a number of Atari computers, with half of them displaying business software and the rest running *Star Raiders*. But despite the reps' ongoing efforts to retain the balance, all of the machines kept being switched to *Star Raiders*. What a surprise!

Flags Unfurled

Nintendo returns with another Game & Watch title, *Flagman*, following the release of *Ball* in April. This is a memory game where you have to repeat the sequence of numbers shown on the screen. It sells 250,000 units worldwide – a number that will be eclipsed by future releases.

Driver Heads Home

The Atari 2600 usually receives pared-back versions of coin-op hits, but *Night Driver* expands on the 1976 black-and-white original. Some colour is added, and now other drivers are slogging along the never-ending road. Players steer using the 2600 Paddle controller.



Tee Off On 2600

The month's second Atari 2600 release is *Golf*. The graphics are basic (check out those trees!) and there is just a single nine-hole course, but like many 2600 games it plays surprisingly well. The system will host other golf games, but it's debatable whether they're more fun.

No HES-itation

The software developer HES (Human Engineered Software) is founded this month in America by Jay Balakrishnan. The company initially targets the Commodore PET, and will later publish Jeff Minter's early VIC-20 titles in the US, including *Andes Attack* (pictured).

Carnival Capers

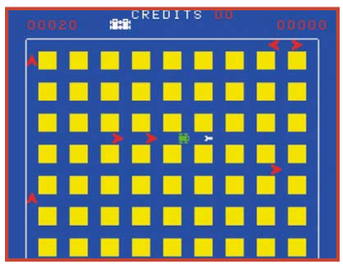
Sega's arcade output shows no sign of slowing down, with two new titles hitting Japanese arcades this month. *Carnival* is a simple fairground shooter that's widely considered to be the first game to feature a bonus round, where you earn points by shooting a poor bear.

Jungle Japes

Let the record show that Sega did indeed release a coin-op this month with the catchy title of *Tranquilizer Gun*. The aim is to shoot wild animals and drag them back to your truck. The game will be released for the SG-1000 console under the more sensible title *Safari Hunting*.

Batter Up!

Midway releases *Extra Bases*, the fourth game in its long-running baseball series. This updated version is the first to run on Midway's Astrocade hardware, meaning it benefits from colour graphics and improved sound. A trackball controller has also been added.



Escape From Targ

Hot on the heels of *Pac-Man* comes *Targ* from Exidy, a maze chase game where you control a car pursued by deadly red arrows. One neat feature is that you can't just change direction at will, you actually have to slow down first, adding a degree of strategy to the game.

SCORE
0 DAZ
1ST
2ND
3RD
QUALIFY:
00'45"00
1 0'33"86
02
2 0'34"40
00'37"3

Hyper Sports

APPARENTLY, IT'S ALL IN THE RHYTHM

» RETROREVIVAL

» ZX SPECTRUM » 1985 » IMAGINE SOFTWARE

My first introduction to Konami's classic coin-op wasn't in a smoke-filled arcade but on a kids' TV show called *First Class*. Hosted by the delightful Debbie Greenwood, it pitted groups of school kids against each other by testing their pop-culture and general knowledge. The highlight for me though, were the arcade sections where the series rotated between Atari's *720°* and *Paperboy* and Konami's *Hyper Sports*, most notably the Skeet Shooting and Vault events.

When I eventually got my hands on *Hyper Sports* it was as part of the fantastic *Konami Arcade Collection* that also included *Jail Break*, *Green Beret*, *Yie Ar Kung-Fu*, *Nemesis*, *Yie Ar Kung-Fu II*, *Shaolin's Road*, *Jackal* and *Ping Pong*. All in all, a decent selection with some genuine belters.

As much as I liked the Amstrad version, I spent most of my time playing the excellent Spectrum conversion, as my friend Paul owned it and we used to get really competitive in the events. I was pretty decent at the Skeet Shooting and Archery events and could often set world records, but the rest of the events were Paul's domain and he absolutely crushed me at one in particular.

I don't know what it was, but I struggled constantly with the Swimming event. I don't know whether I was doing something wrong, or if it was just poor timing on my part, but I could never get a good flow going. I'd be constantly treading water like a fool, while Paul surged ahead with well-timed rests. I constantly practised at home and slowly, ever so slowly, got a little bit better.

The next time I visited Paul I felt a lot more confident and eagerly picked up the joystick, ready to do battle. But the timing was still off, most likely because the coding of the two games was different. I didn't flail in the water as much, but I still couldn't get anywhere near Paul's impressive times. Still, at least I could slay him at Skeet Shooting. ✱

Inside THE A

1200

RETRO GAMES LTD RETURNS WITH THEA1200, THE FULL-SIZE FOLLOW-UP TO THE POPULAR THEA500 MINI THAT LAUNCHED IN 2022. BUT WHY NOT PRODUCE A FULL-SIZE AMIGA 500 FIRST? WE ASK THAT AND MANY MORE QUESTIONS OF THE RGL TEAM, AS WE GO HANDS-ON WITH THE DEVICE THAT LOOKS SET TO TRANSFORM THE AMIGA COMMUNITY

WORDS BY MARTYN CARROLL

The imminent release of THEA1200 transports us right back to 1992, when the Commodore Amiga 1200, the computer on which it's based was launched. It was a simpler time. There were only four terrestrial TV channels in the UK and we watched films on videotape. In terms of tech, the first graphical web browser and Intel's original Pentium processor were still months away. Commodore was still a contender. Amazon was still a jungle.

THEA1200 takes us back – yet its arrival has been hampered by very modern problems. The surge in demand for memory and hardware components, driven by AI adoption, has forced a number of consumer device manufacturers to delay their launches. Retro Games Ltd was one of those affected and in May this year it announced that THEA1200 would be delayed by six months, due to global chip shortages and rising production costs. With this in mind, our first question when we spoke to RGL's chief technology officer Chris Smith and licensing director Darren Melbourne in September was the obvious one: is THEA1200 on track to hit its new December launch date?

"Absolutely," they both answer, almost in unison. "Containers have already shipped," clarifies Chris. "I was on a call with our partners a couple of days ago, discussing how the first containers have gone, talking pinch points in the manufacturing process and all that kind of stuff. So yeah, that's all good." And good to hear. By the time you read this, those containers should have reached their destination and Amiga fans can look forward to receiving the machine before the end of the year. But before we move on, let's get that six-month delay out of the way. "So a lot of stuff happened there," says Chris. "The main issue was chip supply and demand. There's a flash storage chip in THEA1200 and we ended up having to go and get an equivalent chip from a different manufacturer. And because of that, we had to get changes made to the operating system in order to support that chip. So we had to delay in order to meet the production volumes that we needed to meet. It's like, do we do a smaller production run and hit the dates or do we delay it so that everybody who wants it can get it? What we find is worse than delaying something is when only a quarter of your user base gets the product and everybody else has to wait five months. We decided to delay it for everybody, because that's actually fairer. But we still worked really, really hard and put a lot of pressure on our manufacturing partners to get it shipped for December."

> ***"If you stick THEA1200 against an Amiga 1200, they're inseparable in how they look"***
> *Chris Smith*

Things are now moving fast. THEA1200 received its first public showing at the Gamescom expo in August. "We got units ▶

Team RGL

CHRIS SMITH

■ Retro Games Ltd's chief technology officer talks us through the hardware and software decisions that shaped the new machine.

DARREN MELBOURNE

■ The company's licensing director (and self-confessed Commodore fanboy) joins us to discuss the 25 games that are included.

You must have had an argument with a bulldozer the way you're banged up, Mr. Nash...but fortunately the wounds are superficial and you'll be up and around in a couple of days. Can I do anything for you?

» [THEA1200] *It Came From The Desert* is peak Cinemaware, featuring a solid story and a good mix of minigames.

» [THEA1200] *Antheads* was originally released as an expansion disk for *It Came From The Desert*. Here it's presented as a standalone title.

» [THEA1200] *Alien Breed: Tower Assault* was a hybrid release, with the OCS and AGA versions stored on the same disk. The enhanced AGA version is included here.

▶ air-freighted over for Gamescom," says Chris. "They were the first ones off the production line – gold samples, really. Once the sample is signed off, they do a production run to make sure that everything is sufficiently oiled."

And how was the reaction to the product at Gamescom? "Overwhelming, to be honest," says Darren, without hesitation. "I don't know about you, Chris, but I don't think I heard anything even approaching a disparaging comment. It seemed to be loved." Chris agrees. "The people loved it," he says. "And the games line-up, and of course we demonstrated things like games running from Workbench. Kids were just walking up to it, picking up the controller, and they were off, playing these 40-odd-year-old games without any help or prompting. It's fascinating to see. The only negative comment I heard was one person thought that the case was one millimetre smaller than the original! However, the original cases were made in different factories in different places in the world, and they had different moulds.

"So it's like, one millimetre smaller than what version, you know?"

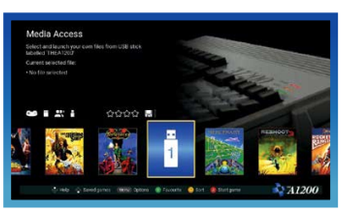
Chris is smiling, but we can tell that tiny criticism stung a little. "We pride ourselves on our attention to detail and accuracy," he explains. "That's part of our reputation now. If you stick THEA1200 against a real Amiga 1200, they're inseparable in terms of how they look. We spent a lot of time measuring every angle and all that kind of stuff. People can have this on their desk and very quickly forget that it's a new product." He's not wrong. **Retro Gamer** received one of the Gamescom units and we can confirm that it is an extremely precise replica. When you're using the machine, typing on the keyboard, seeing the flashing LEDs, hearing the floppy drive grinding as games

GETTING TO WORK(BENCH)

HOW TO TURN THEA1200 INTO A FULLY FUNCTIONAL AMIGA COMPUTER

STEP 1

■ Using the joypad, click Menu and select Switch To Workbench Mode. You will be prompted to insert a blank USB stick containing the required files. Follow the on-screen link for details.

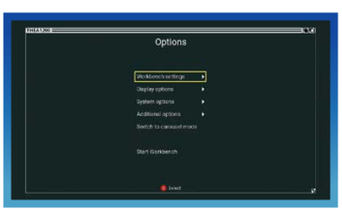


STEP 2

■ With the files in place, insert the USB stick into one of the four ports. The Media Access icon will appear on the carousel (by clicking this, you can launch software files stored on the USB).

STEP 3

■ As in Step 1, select Switch To Workbench Mode again. After a short pause, the Workbench screen will appear. You can now use the Amiga mouse to interact with the visual interface.



STEP 4

■ To exit Workbench, press the small button on the device's right-side for two seconds. This will bring up the Options screen where you can access settings and return to the carousel.

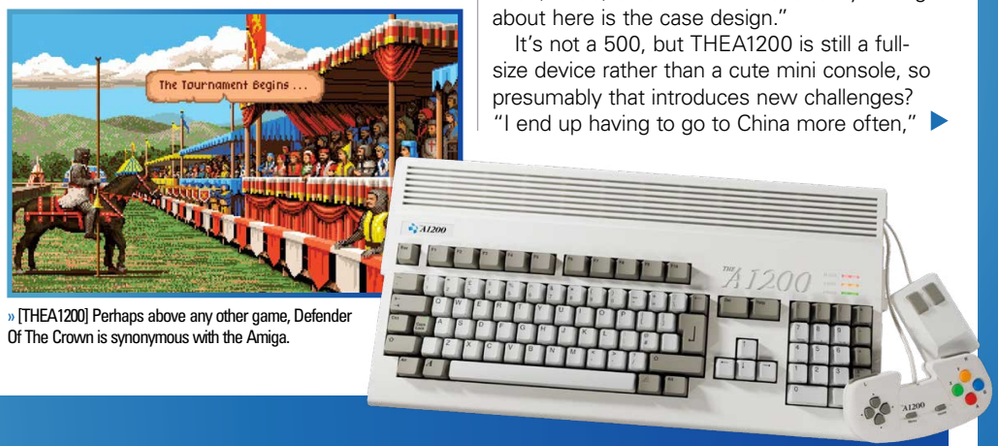
load, you do forget that this is a device manufactured in 2026. Those drive noises are not real of course – there's no working floppy drive (although there is a fake enclosure to give the impression of one). The PCMCIA slot on the left-side of the original Amiga is also missing, as are all the ports at the rear. Instead, the back of the machine is like THEA500 Mini and other plug-and-play devices, featuring a power button, an HDMI out for hooking up to a display and USB ports for connecting stuff like the bundled mouse and gamepad. These two controllers are the same as the ones included with THEA500 Mini, so you get a slightly shrunken Amiga 'tank' mouse (rather than a version of the sleeker, rounded mouse that originally shipped with the 1200) and a gamepad modelled on the Amiga CD32 controller.

THEA1200 does a fine job of replicating the original 1200, but we do wonder why RGL didn't take the more obvious next step and produce a full-sized version of the Amiga 500? Did it miss a trick there? "One of the reasons we jumped to the 1200 is quite a selfish reason," says Darren. "I've been an absolute Commodore fanboy my entire life. And I had one of the first, I think, ten Amigas in the UK. The 1200 was my personal favourite. I just thought it was a spectacular-looking machine. For me it was the epitome of the Amiga. I absolutely loved it. When we were looking at doing the full-size Amiga we didn't dismiss the 500 out of hand, because that's also an incredible machine and the biggest selling of the range. But personally, from an aesthetic perspective, the 1200 just took it for me."

> ***"The 1200 was my personal favourite. For me it was the epitome of the Amiga"***
> *Darren Melbourne*

Chris has a similar view, but he's also looking at it with his commercial hat on. "The aesthetic, yeah, but there were the tooling costs too," he says. "Because the 500 is so much bigger, the tooling costs would have been so much greater. Also, as a consumer, you've got to find the desk space for that massive thing. We talked about the Amiga 600 as well. In terms of compactness, the 600 makes sense. But the 600 didn't sell very well. As Darren says, the 1200 is very iconic in its styling. It was basically the golden hour of Amiga products. And of course, THEA1200 also supports the 500, 600, 1200, 4000, CD32… so all we're really talking about here is the case design."

It's not a 500, but THEA1200 is still a full-size device rather than a cute mini console, so presumably that introduces new challenges? "I end up having to go to China more often," ▶



» [THEA1200] Perhaps above any other game, Defender Of The Crown is synonymous with the Amiga.

AND ON THE KEYS...

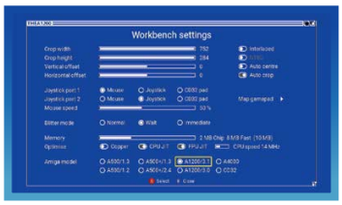
GETTING HANDS ON WITH THEA1200'S FULL-SIZE KEYBOARD

One of the main selling points of THEA1200 over THEA500 Mini is that the new machine features a full-size, fully working keyboard. Not only does it look like the original but we can report that it also feels and sounds the same. Yes, the key response and the familiar click-click-click as you tap away are spot on. It's so uncanny we presumed it must have taken a lot of time and effort to perfect. Not so, says Chris Smith.

"It's outsourced," he reveals. "The keyboard is manufactured by a proper keyboard manufacturer who has done a couple of things for us now. I mean, if you can do it right, do it right. They had an original 1200 keyboard to look at so they knew what the key travel, the activation force and the click feedback needed to be, and they just modelled it. For us, that was a relatively straightforward process. The end result was bang on because Commodore used almost standard keyboards from different manufacturers as well. And because it was already an ISO keyboard, it was unchallenging for the keyboard manufacturer to get into really. It was relatively painless."

If you've not used an Amiga keyboard for a while you will feel immediately at home. And yes, you can still reset the computer by pressing Ctrl and the left and right Amiga keys at the same time.

» On key. The keyboard is admirably close to the one on the original Amiga 1200.



STEP 5

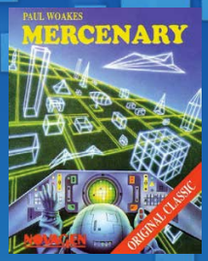
Click Workbench Settings and a screen will pop up where you can configure a variety of options. You can select controllers and switch between the different Amiga models.

STEP 6

If you'd prefer to skip the games carousel and jump straight to Workbench on start-up, click Additional Options and then Boot Options. Select Workbench Mode and you're all set.

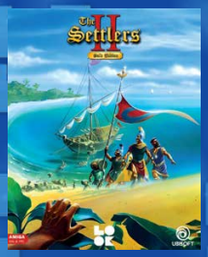
THE GAMES

THEA1200 COMES WITH 25 AMIGA GAMES BUILT-IN

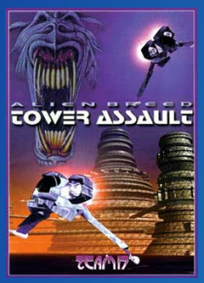


MERCENARY: ESCAPE FROM TARG
1988 • Novagen

RESHOOT PROXIMA 3 (AGA)
2023 • Spieleschreiber



THE SETTLERS II (AGA, RTG)
2025 • Blue Byte



ALIEN BREED: TOWER ASSAULT (AGA)
1994 • Team 17

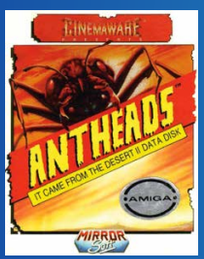
DEFENDER OF THE CROWN
1986 • Cinemaware

DEFENDER OF THE CROWN II (CD)
1993 • Cinemaware

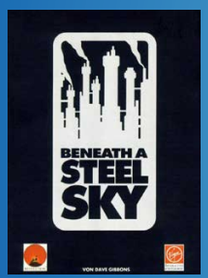
IT CAME FROM THE DESERT
1989 • Cinemaware

LORDS OF THE RISING SUN
1988 • Cinemaware

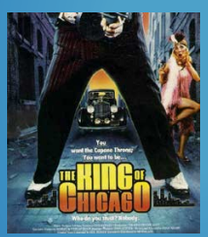
LURE OF THE TEMPTRESS
1992 • Revolution



ANTHEADS
1990 • Cinemaware



BENEATH A STEEL SKY
1994 • Revolution

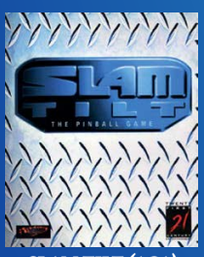


THE KING OF CHICAGO
1987 • Cinemaware

ROCKET RANGER
1988 • Cinemaware

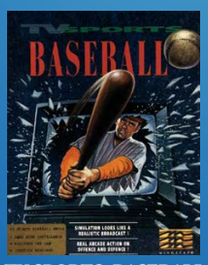
SDI
1986 • Cinemaware

RUFF 'N' TUMBLE
1994 • Wunderkind



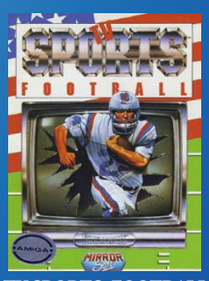
SLAM TILT (AGA)
1996 • Liquid Dezign

TURRICAN
1990 • Factor 5



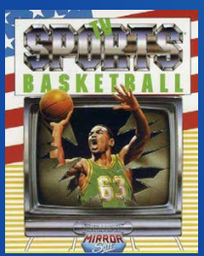
TV SPORTS: BASEBALL
1992 • Cinemaware

TV SPORTS: BOXING
1991 • Cinemaware



TV SPORTS: FOOTBALL
1988 • Cinemaware

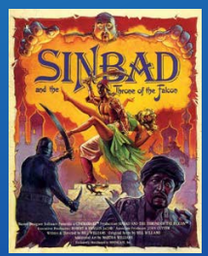
WINGS
1990 • Cinemaware



TV SPORTS: BASKETBALL
1990 • Cinemaware

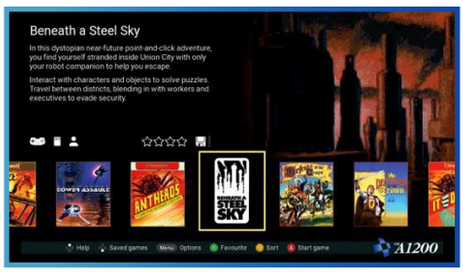
TURRICAN II: THE FINAL FIGHT
1991 • Factor 5

TURRICAN 3: PAYMENT DAY
1993 • Factor 5

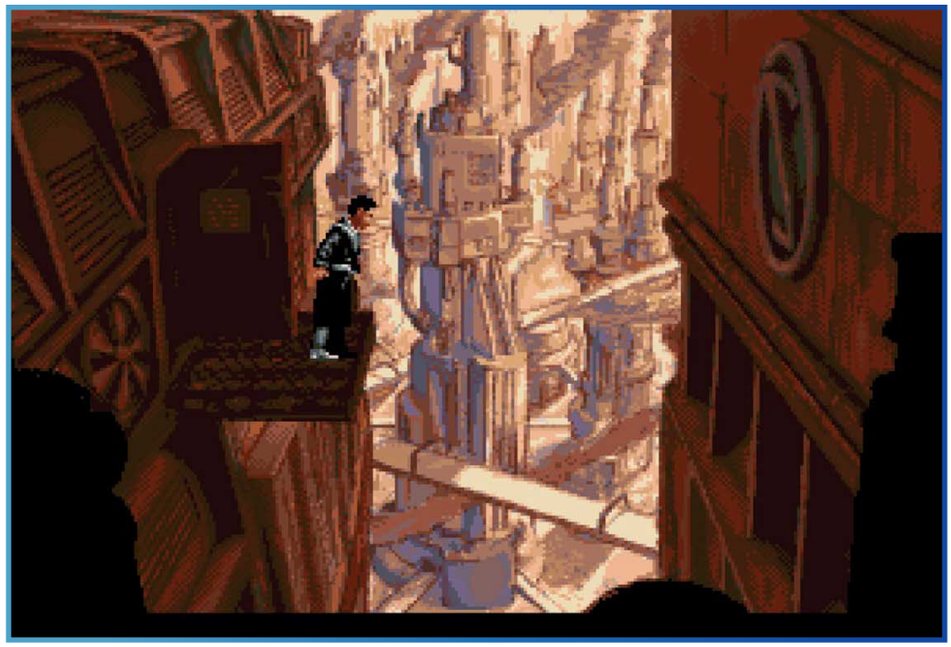


SINBAD AND THE THRONE OF THE FALCON
1987 • Cinemaware

» [THEA1200] The WWI-set *Wings* is one of the more arcade-orientated titles in the Cinemaware catalogue.


Beneath a Steel Sky
In this dystopian near-future point-and-click adventure, you find yourself stranded inside Union City with only your robot companion to help you escape.
Interact with characters and objects to solve puzzles. Travel between districts, blending in with workers and executives to evade security.
Help
Saved games
Options
Favourite
Sort
Start game
A1200

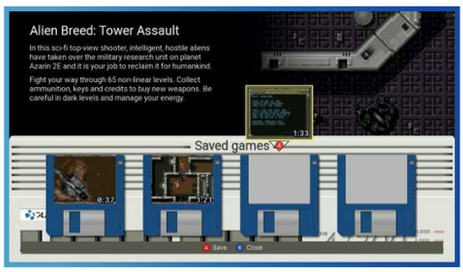
» [THEA1200] "The user interface is very accessible and very modern," says Chris Smith. "If you know how to use Netflix, you can use it."



» [THEA1200] Revolution's *Beneath A Steel Sky* is much nicer to play when you don't have to juggle 15 floppy disks.

says Chris, smiling. "The challenge is there's a lot more plastic. In terms of cost, it's not that much, but making the moulds is much more difficult, both from a financial point of view and also moulding plastic that big. It brings in far more challenges all around." At this point, Chris starts talking about heat distribution, and warping and shrinking, and internal supports – all vital considerations.

Meanwhile, we're wondering about the weight of the thing. It's a fair bit lighter than the original, but unlike some previous RGL products, weights have not been used to give it extra heft. Was this to help reduce transportation costs? "Given the weight of our products, it doesn't really affect shipping in that respect," says Chris. "It's more about being conscious of putting weights in. The weights are steel, so you are consuming resources. It's like, well, why are we doing that? Also, it was tricky to do on the 1200 because it was quite well balanced already. The keyboard's got a big metal plate under it, so it's really stable and it's chunky. No, it's not as heavy as the original because you haven't got that massive PCB or the RF shielding or the floppy drive in there."


Alien Breed: Tower Assault
In this sci-fi top-view shooter, intelligent, hostile aliens have taken over the military research unit on planet Azarin 2E and it is your job to reclaim it for humankind.
Fight your way through 65 non-linear levels. Collect ammunition, keys and credits to buy new weapons. Be careful in dark levels and manage your energy.
Saved games
Save
Close

» [THEA1200] The save system returns from THEA500 Mini, featuring four slots for each game.

As we've mentioned, there's no floppy drive, but there are drive sounds which create a fantastic, aural throwback to the old Amiga days. "It's just the emulator we've used, a UAE derivative," Chris reveals. "You can control the volume of the floppy drive if you want to, so you can turn it right off or you can make it super loud. It does sound good.

"There was a decision about whether we should put that in. We didn't have it on THEA500 Mini, but on THEA1200, we've done a lot of work on the LEDs to make them look decent – you can't get those LEDs anymore, you know? – so we felt it was important to also have the floppy drive sounds. So time was spent on making sure it sounded right, but we didn't really have to do too much work because the community had already sorted that out in the emulator and made it sound great. "

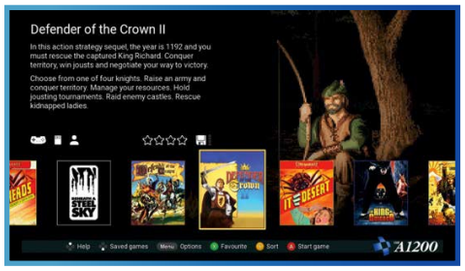
> ***"We learned a lot from THEA500 Mini, taking on feedback from the community"***
> *Chris Smith*

What about the hardware inside the machine? Is it powered by the same ARM SOC (System On A Chip) as the Mini? "So the hardware is different," says Chris. "It's the same SOC but you know, it's six years later, so there's been loads of low-level improvements and optimisations and that kind of thing. We learned a lot from THEA500 Mini, taking on a lot of feedback from the community, and we're improving our technology and our IP all of the time." So just how capable is the hardware? What can and can't it do? "Well we've done a load of benchmarks, so we know that when we put the CPU speed right up and max out the performance of the Workbench – which is how it boots out-of-the-box – you can decode MP3s without glitching. It feels like it comes out at about 60MHz. It depends what you're running and your mileage will vary, but for your day-to-day common tasks – 95% of the productivity things that you might be doing within Workbench – it's faster than an original 1200 would ever have been."

Quite a lot of online chatter points to THEA1200 outputting at 1080p. Chris is quick to correct this, revealing that it's a 720p device, just like the Mini – and with good reason, in his opinion. "For a chunk of the time we were developing THEA1200, 1080p was down as a loose requirement," he says. "During R&D we discovered that scaling Workbench was not ideal, because you don't want scaling artefacts. Plus, 720p is a ginormous Workbench experience that you wouldn't have had back in the day. You go up to 1080p and everything starts getting really small. I mean, properly small in terms of the font. 720p was like, this is really usable. At 1080p you're reaching for your glasses. It was leaning towards unusable. When it comes to scaling games, a lot of games are around about 240 scan lines. So if you multiply that by a factor of three, it's 720. Fantastic. If you're then trying to scale that in 1080p, you end up with more black borders. You can use screen fit, which will scale it and keep the correct aspect ratio, but then you get scaling artefacts. So both of these things conspired against us having 1080p in the product. I think you can take from this that it's complicated and we spent a lot of time looking at it."

» [THEA1200] *Rocket Ranger* is one of Cinemaware's finest titles – if you can get airborne, that is.

» [THEA1200] Designed to run exclusively on AGA Amigas, *Slam Tilt* is one of the best games in the collection.


Defender of the Crown II
In this action strategy sequel, the year is 1192 and you must rescue the captured King Richard. Conquer territory, win jousts and negotiate your way to victory.
Choose from one of four knights. Raise an army and conquer territory. Manage your resources. Hold jousting tournaments. Raid enemy castles. Rescue kidnapped ladies.
A1200

» [THEA1200] *Defender Of The Crown II* is the sole CDTV/32 game included on the carousel. It loads just like all the other games (ie quickly and painlessly).

» [THEA1200] Released in 2023, *Reshoot Proxima 3* is a brilliant shmup and one of the showcase titles included with the machine.

» [THEA1200] *Turrican II: The Final Fight* is still a blast. It's surely the highlight of Manfred Trenz's *Turrican* trilogy.

Let's turn to games now. Once again, you can drop your own games on a USB stick and load them with minimal hassle. But for instant gratification, THEA1200 comes with 25 games already installed. None of the games are repeated from THEA500 Mini line-up, and there are some genuine Amiga classics, including *Defender Of The Crown*, *Beneath A Steel Sky*, *Slam Tilt* and *Turrican II: The Final Fight*. There are also a couple of standout titles that point to the possibilities of the system: *Defender Of The Crown II*, a CD-ROM game originally released for the CDTV/32 systems, and *The Settlers II: Gold Edition*, a recent title that uses RTG (ReTargetable Graphics) to truly enhance the visuals (see the Settling In panel for a bit more on that).

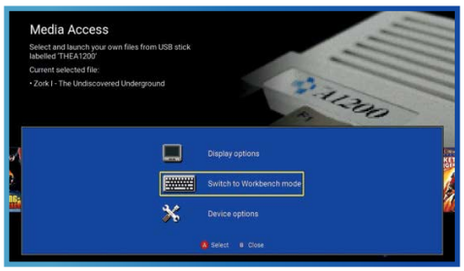
> ***"We probably worked on acquiring the Cinemaware titles for six or seven years. These things are rarely fast"***
> *Darren Melbourne*

Darren reveals that licensing games for inclusion doesn't get any easier. "Being honest, it probably gets harder every year," he says. "Since Chris and I and the team embarked on our first machine 12 years ago now, we've seen a lot of classic IP get hoovered up by corporations. In a lot of respects this moves it from sensibly affordable to hidden behind an expensive paywall. In some cases it's just unobtainable. Because it's now hidden within a large corporate machine that doesn't really want to entertain smaller projects such as ours. A lot of these bigger companies, who will remain nameless but they know who they are, have a financial minimum, so if we go to them and say, look, we want to license A, B and C from you, they'll say, that's all well and good, but our financial minimum is $100,000 for our legal costs and our time and everything else, which makes it a non-starter from the get-go. We have a lot of people saying, why haven't you got this game? Why haven't you got that game? Quite simply, it's because they're priced out of our market."

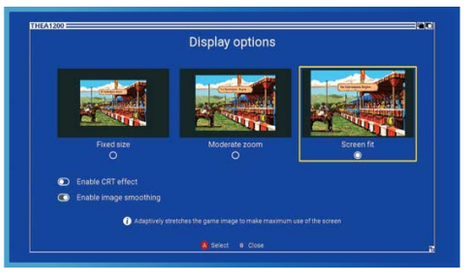
He continues, "The other grim reality is we're often dealing with games that were created 30 or 40 years ago and some of these people are sadly not with us any longer. My peer group from back in the day, a lot of them just aren't around to do the deals with, which again makes life a lot more difficult." Presumably, the deal to land the 14 Cinemaware titles was simpler, seeing as that IP is still active? Not quite, says Darren. "I've been trying to unpick the Cinemaware rights since before we started on THEA500 Mini. They previously resided with Starbreeze Studios in Stockholm. I actually went and visited Starbreeze twice to try and extricate the rights to allow us to use them earlier than now. And the process was hampered by the fact that they were trying to sell the rights full stop. But we kept working away in the background and when Nordcurrent became the new owners in 2024, it was one of the first phone calls that we made. And it probably took us about 16 months plus to convince them of how worthwhile it would be. Now, subsequently, they're really pleased we've done it. It has put a lot of focus on *Defender Of The Crown* again, which is the game they've just rereleased as an updated remake. In total we probably worked on acquiring the Cinemaware titles for six or seven years. These things are rarely fast."

Mercenary: Escape from Targ
In this wireframe 3D action-adventure you are a 21st century soldier of fortune, crash-landed on the strife-torn planet Targ.
Use your wits to survive and prosper. Fly above the planet in a variety of craft. Search mysterious subterranean complexes. Become embroiled in the conflict between the Palyars and the usurper Mechanoids.
Game controls
Increase throttle
Up
Left
Down
Right
Accelerate
Decrease throttle
Leave vehicle
Brake
Fire
Enter vehicle
Special actions
Close

» [THEA1200] THEA1200 automatically maps games with lots of controls to the gamepad.



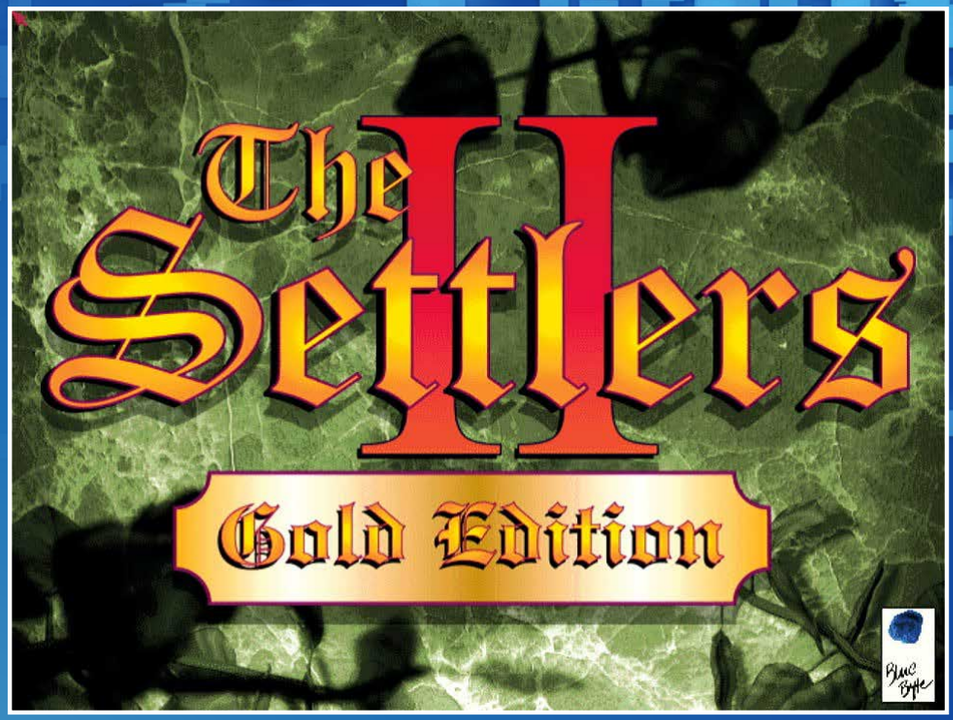
» [THEA1200] You can jump to Workbench mode by pressing the Menu button on the gamepad controller.



» [THEA1200] There are a bunch of display options you can play around with, including a CRT effect filter.

One piece of good news for Darren and the team was the recent agreement relating to the ownership of the Amiga and Commodore names, ending years of confusion and contention. "Thank goodness, at long last," says Darren when we ask about the agreement. "I think one of the benefits it brings is there's no more ambiguity over who owns what. When we first started working on THEA500 Mini, we spent a lot of time being really cautious about what we can do, what we can't do, even down to the name of the machine itself. And I think what they've managed to do with the settlement, with Hyperion and everything else they've done, is they've actually clarified the ownership for the first time since back in the Commodore days. So from a business and commercial perspective, it's taken any doubt or ambiguity away as to where the rights reside. It also means we've only got one point of contact for Amiga now, which is fantastic. I think it has made our lives, professionally, much easier."

The agreement means that THEA1200 is now officially an Amiga product, which is fitting as the device is far closer to a proper Amiga than the Mini ever was. It's not just a mere



SETTLING IN

UNEARTHING THE TREASURE THAT IS THE SETTLERS II: GOLD EDITION

Of the 25 games included with THEA1200, one stands out in particular. *The Settlers II* was originally released for the PC in 1996 and at the time it was deemed too demanding to bring to the Amiga. Then just last year, publisher Look Behind You released a native Amiga port of the expanded *Gold Edition*. This special version requires a hefty Amiga with a 68040 CPU running at 40MHz as a minimum – but you can play it on THEA1200 with zero faff.

Explaining the story behind the game's inclusion, Darren Melbourne says, "Mike Battilana, the Amiga CEO, called me and said, 'I've just seen a demo of *Settlers II* and it's incredible.' And I laughed it off. In a different life, I used to be the third-party development director for Ubisoft. And so I went back to Mike and said, 'Yeah, it'd be lovely if it was official, but I know how difficult it is to convince Ubisoft to do this kind of thing.' And he says, 'Actually, it *is* official from Ubisoft and they did it via the Blue Byte team in Dusseldorf.' The game's publisher Nico Barbat met with us at Gamescom last year and demoed what he was working on and we resolved to do whatever we could to make sure it was one of the games on the platform. It's such an incredible showcase of what THEA1200 can do."

The game uses RTG (ReTargetable Graphics), the standard that allows the Amiga to use third-party graphics hardware instead of the computer's native chipset. This allowed the developers to ramp up the resolution and colour depth, creating a visual upgrade you'll notice as soon as you boot up the game. Implementing RTG on THEA1200 was not a trivial task. "It's an amazing game and to have it was such a coup," says Chris Smith. "But running in RTG mode gave us the complication that we now needed an RTG driver which we would then have to go and license, and that's problematic. RGL and Amiga Corp worked together to develop an RTG driver, written from scratch, that is owned by Amiga Corp. So that allowed us to run *Settlers II* in RTG mode and have RTG on the Workbench. It's baked into our product and it's a super optimised version of the driver as well, so it runs things much better than CyberGraphX and Picasso96." Darren agrees, "It's infinitely an advancement over whatever else is on the market."

» [Amiga/THEA1200] Compare the original *The Settlers*, running at standard Amiga resolution (left), with *The Settler's II: Gold Edition*, running at 640x480 and scaled up. There's so much more visual detail.

» THEA1200 comes with a 36-page *Zzap!Amiga* magazine, which includes features and reviews.

» [THEA1200] Cinemaware's *TV Sports* games are nice to look at, but not always fun to play.

» [THEA1200] *Ruff 'N' Tumble* from Renegade Software is a fun platform run-and-gun if that's your thing.

games box. "It's a more accessible machine," says Chris, "for somebody who wants to do productivity type stuff, Workbench-y type stuff. There was definitely a market for that and the audience was crying out for it. Hence, you had the Pandory mod for the Mini, which brought you quite a decent Workbench environment." With THEA1200 you can toggle between the games carousel and Workbench, or choose to boot straight to Workbench every time if you prefer. Users can also load their own preferred version of Workbench from USB. "We don't know what version of Workbench users want," he continues, "so they get an official Amiga baseline Workbench and they can replace that with any other version of Workbench they want."

Chris is confident this flexibility will encourage people to choose it as a development platform. "We know from THEC64 that there are people who are still developing games and software for THEC64 that no longer use their original machines – they use our product because it's reliable, it's stable, it's quick to save, it's convenient because they can stick things on a USB stick and then plug it in their PC. So we know that people have transitioned to using our stuff as their main

AGA ESSENTIALS

SEEK THESE OUT IF YOU'RE LOOKING FOR MORE AGA-EXCLUSIVES LIKE SLAM TILT

OVERKILL

1993 • Vision Software

The first game to be designed specifically for AGA Amigas is a *Defender* clone that utilises a fantastic parallax scrolling effect. This probably could have been ported to standard Amigas without sacrificing too much, but it certainly would have lost some of its speed – and sheen.

BANSHEE

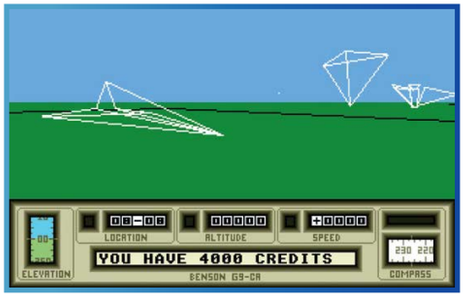
1994 • Core Design

If *Overkill* made a ripple in Amiga waters, this co-op vertical shooter made an almighty splash. The game makes great use of the extra memory, serving up really long levels that can last upwards of ten minutes. Best played with a pal so you can blaze through it together.

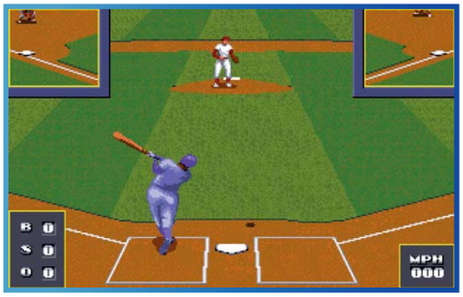
GUARDIAN

1994 • Acid Software

It's *Starwing* on the Amiga – kind of, or at least the closest thing to it. This was originally released for the CD32 before being squeezed onto a couple of disks and reissued for AGA Amigas. The 3D graphics are excellent – and buttery smooth if you ramp up the MHz.



» [THEA1200] Paul Woakes' *Mercenary* is better known as an 8-bit masterpiece, but it's still a standout title on the Amiga.



» [THEA1200] *TV Sports: Baseball* was originally published by Mindscape following Cinemaware's bankruptcy in 1991.

» [THEA1200] *The King Of Chicago* is an early Cinemaware effort where you look to climb the criminal ranks.

workhorse and keep their original protected because you never know when it's going to go pop. And it will be the same with THEA1200. Hence, you can boot straight into Workbench if that's your primary mode. But you can easily flip to carousel mode if you just want to play the games that come installed. So it suits everybody."

> ***"We're part of the community. We make the products that we'd want for ourselves"***
> *Chris Smith*

The price should suit people too. At £169, THEA1200 is at least half the price of what the original hardware will likely set you back these days. "We had to buy two," says Chris. "We stopped at two because it was like, *really*?" Darren chips in, "And don't forget, when we buy them, we take them to pieces. We break 'em as soon as we get 'em." It appears that RGL can't state that no 1200s were harmed in the making of this device. "Well they haven't really died," says Chris. "They're now in kit form."

The introduction of a capable new Amiga computer that doesn't cost the Earth and caters for both casual and serious users can only help expand the Amiga community. Post release, we anticipate online groups attracting many new members and lots of exciting new software in the works. "That's something we saw with THEC64, the growing of the community," agrees Chris. "We've had more games coming out of the community. We are aware, and so we want to lean into that because that's giving people what they want. I mean, we're part of the community. We make the products that we'd want for ourselves. You know, it is a business, OK, and we're making a living, but at the same time, the reason we're doing this comes out of passion and enjoyment."

Of course, users can always emulate the Amiga if they wish, but devices like THEA1200 feel so much closer to the original hardware. They're not the same exactly, but they're the next best thing – and for most people that's enough. "We try and get our products to do 80% of what 80% of people want," says Chris. "They can't do everything for everybody. There are always going to be those diehards who really want to be using an FPGA or actual real hardware. And there are going to be some games which are just too challenging for emulation – they require exact timing and all that kind of stuff. That's just the way it is. What we try to do is reduce all of those options that can become overwhelming when you're using an emulator. But that ease of access comes with some reduction in flexibility. So we're trying to tread that line the best we can."

You'll be able to judge for yourself whether RGL has found the right balance when THEA1200 is released on 4 December. Looking beyond that, we know that the company has other retro products in the pipeline, but we're assuming that THEA1200 is its final offering in the Amiga space? "You know what," says Darren, "as much as I'm going to get kicked for this statement, watch this space. Let's put it this way, I think the Amiga journey is beginning, not ending." ✱

DISNEY'S ALADDIN

1994 • Virgin Interactive

The Amiga version might be a step-down from the celebrated Mega Drive original, with a few missing elements, but it's really not far off and features lots of lovely cartoon-style graphics and animation. If you're looking for a game to show off the AGA visuals this is it.

GLOOM

1995 • Black Magic

Back in 1995, every Amiga developer and their dog was working on a *Doom* clone. The extra memory and faster processor of the Amiga 1200 made them viable (just about) and the best of the bunch was *Gloom* – although the lack of an on-screen gun is a little odd.

WORMS: THE DIRECTOR'S CUT

1996 • Team 17

They saved one of the best until last. The enhanced version of the original classic arrived late in the Amiga's commercial life, but it was worth the wait. It features loads of new weapons, beautifully enhanced visuals and a custom level designer as an added bonus.

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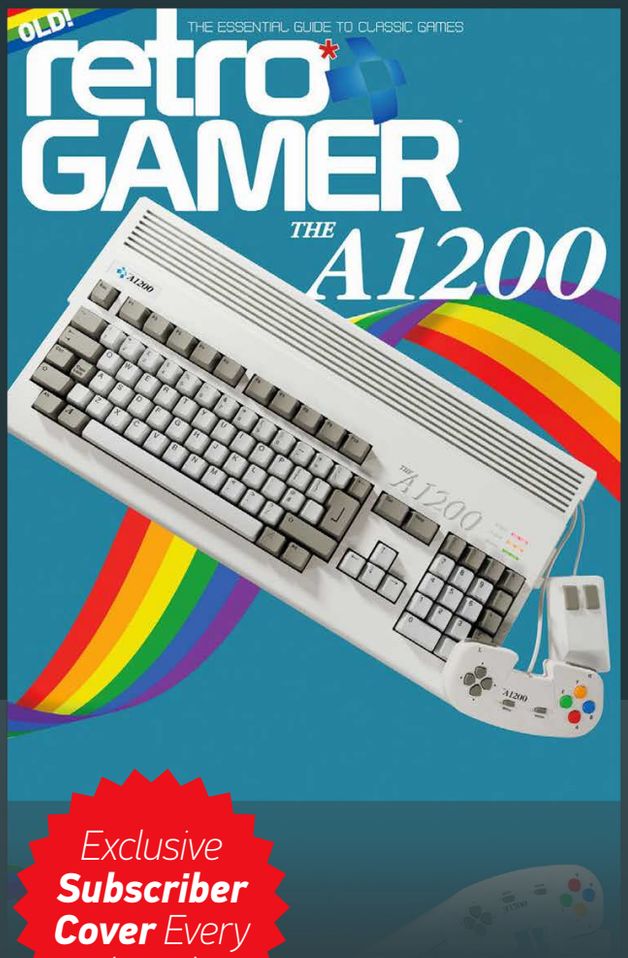

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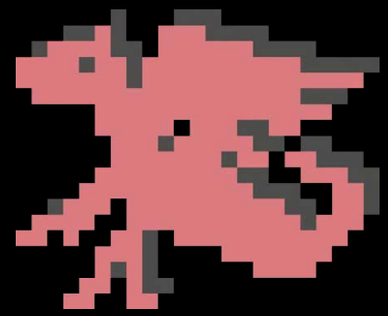
THE MAKING OF Hero of the GOLDEN Talisman



MR CHIP SOFTWARE CREATED NUMEROUS GAMES FOR VARIOUS COMMODORE SYSTEMS AND MANY OF THEM WERE BY THE TALENTED SHAUN SOUTHERN. HERE HE EXPLAINS HOW A CLASSIC US GOLD GAME HELPED INSPIRE A QUEST FOR A GOLDEN TALISMAN

WORDS BY DAVID CROOKS

IN THE KNOW

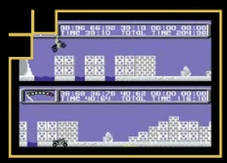
- **PUBLISHER:** MASTERTRONIC
- **DEVELOPER:** MR CHIP SOFTWARE
- **PLATFORM:** COMMODORE 64, AMSTRAD CPC
- **RELEASED:** 1985
- **GENRE:** ACTION-ADVENTURE

If *Hero Of The Golden Talisman* bore a resemblance to *Impossible Mission*, then it was certainly no accident. "*Hero Of The Golden Talisman* was meant to be an *Impossible Mission* type of game where you had to search out and find things, and at least be fairly nimble with the joystick along the way," says the game's developer Shaun Southern. "The character was a complete rip-off – only animated really badly."

It was 1985 and Shaun was already making something of a name for himself in videogame development, writing titles for Mr Chip Software, a studio set up by Doug Braisby. He tended to make sports, racing and arcade titles including *Olympic Skier*, *PacMania*, *Duck Shoot* and *AD Infinitum* as well as *Kikstart: Off Road Simulator* which Mr Chip originally published and Mastertronic rereleased. As such, the sprawling action-adventure game *Hero Of The Golden Talisman* was a departure but what emerged was a cult title that felt richly rewarding to play and one of Mastertronic's finest releases.

Shaun is not entirely sure what inspired him to make *Hero Of The Golden Talisman*. He's also a little hazy on the finer details of its development. What he can say is that he'd created the game entirely alone for the Commodore 64 using a machine code monitor which he vaguely recalls writing himself. "I only remember it being very basic," he says. "It just translated machine code instructions into their binary/byte values and there was nothing clever like labels or passes."

It can also be supposed that Shaun approached the game in the same way as his previous titles by coming up with the basic premise first then working on the game's mechanics. With *Impossible Mission* in mind, Shaun says he knew he wanted platforms, puzzles, various ways to get from screen to screen, enemies and plenty of objects to collect and use. But he also had some specific elements he wanted to explore and he spent some time seeing if they were feasible. "Most of my games started with the technical aspect," he says. "I'd look to see if I could



DEVELOPER HIGHLIGHTS

TUTTI FRUTTI

PLATFORM: COMMODORE 16, COMMODORE PLUS/4

RELEASED: 1985

COSMIC CAUSEWAY: TRAILBLAZER II

PLATFORM: COMMODORE 64

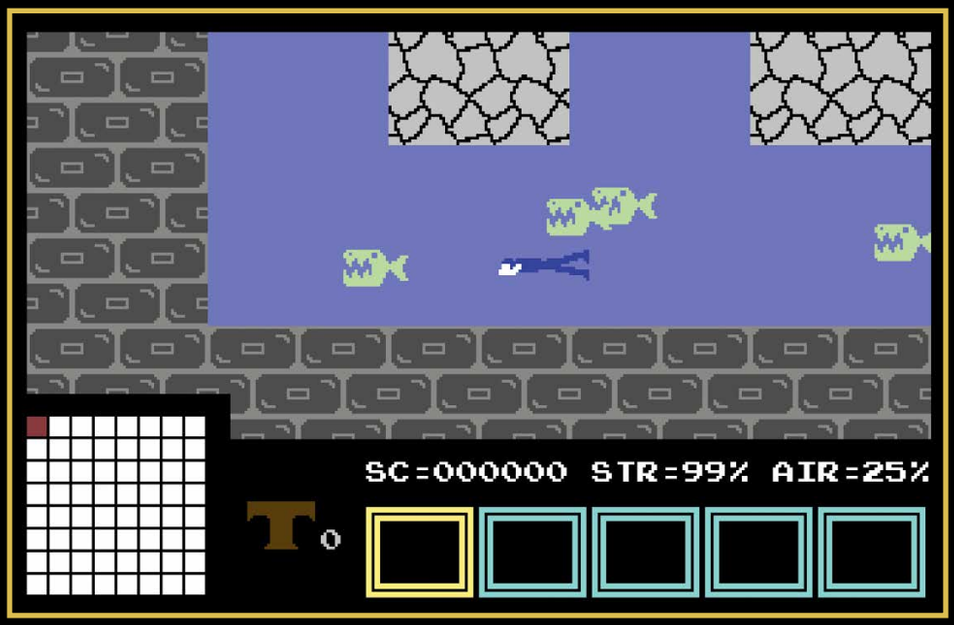
RELEASED: 1986

KIKSTART 2 (PICTURED)

PLATFORM: COMMODORE 64, VARIOUS

RELEASED: 1987

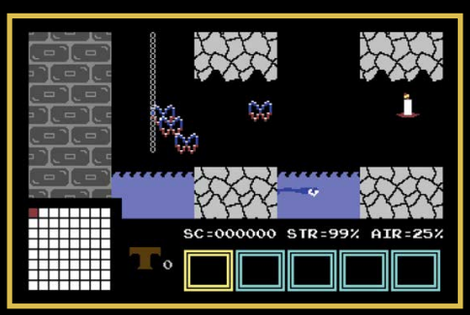
Shaun Southern wrote numerous games for the 8-bit Commodore machines, many of which were published by Mr Chip Software.



» [C64] Plenty of air is needed for the swimming sections. Run out and the hero's strength begins to deplete.

get something working that was fast and smooth and felt fun and tense."

One idea was to give the player the ability to swim which Shaun figured could be turned into a challenging mechanic, not only by throwing in sea creatures that could zap the player's strength, but by requiring the main character to have sufficient air to be able to remain underwater for any length of time. "I wanted to have long sections of water that the players needed enough air to traverse and make it more challenging by ensuring players didn't know where they were going," Shaun says. "I felt swimming into large areas of water not knowing quite when you would run out of air would be quite tense and, if players ran out of air then, the next time, they'd be more prepared. In one of my later games, *Kid Chaos*, a favourite bit was when you had to time running down a long corridor while a laser beam almost caught you up and you had to jump out at the last minute. The air mechanic in *Hero Of The Golden Talisman* was sort of a precursor to gameplay elements like this. I also wanted players to learn patterns like in *Trailblazer*, a game I made a year later."



» [C64] The hero can only emerge from the water if there is a rope to grab hold of.

Shaun also wanted to produce a maze-like game, one which players could really get stuck into and have fun exploring. "For me, development was usually more about the technical aspects of the games but I no doubt wanted to make *Hero Of The Golden Talisman* as big a world as possible to explore," he says. Shaun plotted the game's virtual world on paper. "I think I created a big map, drawn on graph paper with different sheets stuck together with Sellotape," Shaun says. "Exploring and learning the map would be the game."

> "I'D LOOK TO SEE IF I COULD GET SOMETHING WORKING THAT WAS FAST AND SMOOTH"
> **SHAUN SOUTHERN**

While creating the map, Shaun's concept for a flick-screen adventure began to evolve fast. He included platforms to traverse, ropes to climb, the aforementioned water to swim in, weapons to collect and enemies to dispatch. He envisioned players would need to collect coloured keys to open coloured doors, pick up candles to light the way through dark sections and find fruit to help build up their strength. In the process, he added some additional quirks.

If the player plunged into water, the character would only be able to get back out if there was a rope available to climb. If not, they'd have to quickly get to a part where a rope could be grabbed or risk running out of air. He also ensured that jumping required some skill. To access particular sections, ▶

AMSTRAD ACTION

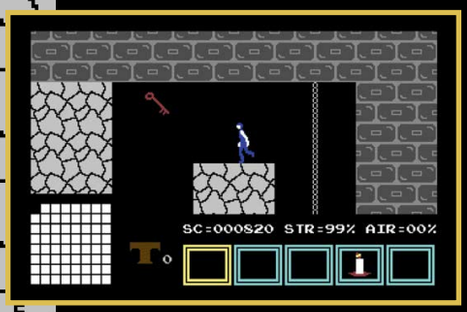
SHAUN'S GAME WAS ONLY RELEASED ON ONE OTHER MACHINE...

Shaun Southern developed *Hero Of The Golden Talisman* for the Commodore 64 but the game was also released for the Amstrad CPC. Converted by Robert Sansom, the CPC version made use of the computer's Mode 0, giving it a low display resolution of 160x200 pixels and a vivid palette of up to 16 simultaneous colours.

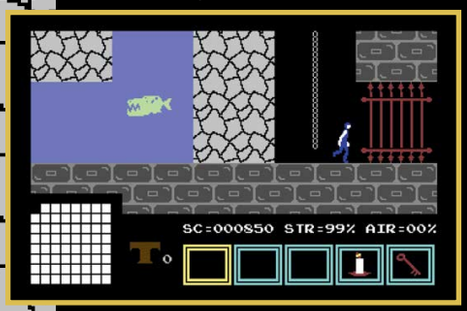
While this made the game appear more garish than its Commodore 64 counterpart, the core mechanics of the title remained largely unchanged. The main differences lay in the way the enemies spawned and there was a slightly clumsier feel to the jumping. The Commodore 64 version was, however, the superior version so it feels apt that it sold 39,354 copies compared to 9,823 on the CPC although much of that difference can also be attributed to the relative popularity of the two machines.

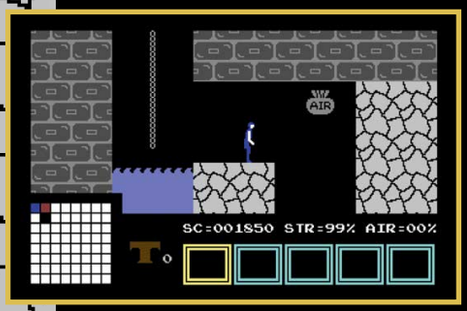
There was never a Spectrum version and Shaun can only speculate as to why. One thing is certain, he wasn't in a position to convert the game himself. "I only coded things on the Commodore 64, Commodore 16 and VIC-20," he says. "I never even owned a Spectrum and it had a different processor." As such, any conversions would have needed to be done by other people. "I guess Mastertronic just didn't commission a Spectrum version," Shaun adds.

» [Amstrad CPC] *Hero Of The Golden Talisman* was converted to the Amstrad by Robert Sansom.



» [C64] Finding keys unlocks gates and opens up whole new areas to explore.





» [C64] Players need to find power-ups in order to boost their strength and supply of air.

players needed to push diagonally on the joystick while standing in the right spot or risk bouncing off walls, missing the landing and having to start over.

It was important that players had an objective too so Shaun began to think about the plot. The game, he surmised, would involve a wizard stealing a Golden Talisman that had, up to that point, protected the hero's town. By smashing the magical object into five pieces and discarding them, the wizard was able to put the town under a curse – one that could only be lifted by finding those pieces and gluing them back together.

It soon became clear that Shaun had a mammoth game on his hands. The sprawling world ended up spreading over a whopping 512 screens ("Who counted them?" Shaun asks) and the maze appeared to be shaping into a satisfying challenge with a clever design that had turned navigation into a puzzle of its own. "I think the size of the maze was the main gameplay element and you could literally get lost in there," Shaun says. "Sometimes you could see where you needed to go but you had to go a long way round to get to it."

Shaun strategically placed the various collectible objects around the maze and he began to consider the enemies in more detail. Sometimes those two elements went hand in hand. "The game involved finding and collecting things but with enemies thrown in to harass you," Shaun says. "I wanted to put things in the maze that players had to find first and track back to use which would add game time. *Hero Of The Golden Talisman* was fairly linear like that, even though people said it was a huge world to explore."

Among the collectibles were spells that were used to help defeat dragons that blocked the player's path at strategic locations and, given the game's leaning towards fantasy, Shaun had fun coming up with various creatures to test the player. "There was a fair set of random things in the maze, which suited it OK, as you were meant to be exploring and finding new things, but they were pretty odd," Shaun says. "Shapes, lips, piranhas, dragons, space hoppers, ghosts… all very dissonant, but I think it added to the charm a little."

He says the enemy graphics were relatively rudimentary. "I designed them badly," he laughs. "I'd say my graphics were usually pretty odd to say the least." To create the game's graphics, Shaun says he converted grid blocks into numbers. "I drew the graphics onto graph paper, worked out the binary values and typed them in," he says. "When we go onto the Amiga, we could save things from Deluxe Paint, but on the Commodore

"THE BLOCKY MAP WAS PROBABLY SOMEONE ELSE'S SUGGESTION"
SHAUN SOUTHERN

MAD RELEASES

OTHER ESSENTIAL GAMES ON THE MAD LABEL TO TRY

THE LAST V8

Despite having many flaws, David Darling's punishing, post-apocalyptic, top-down driving game *The Last V8* is still considered by many to be a cult classic. Praised for its ambition, attractiveness and cool Rob Hubbard soundtrack, it's a technical triumph but whether or not you can beat it is another matter.

SPELLBOUND

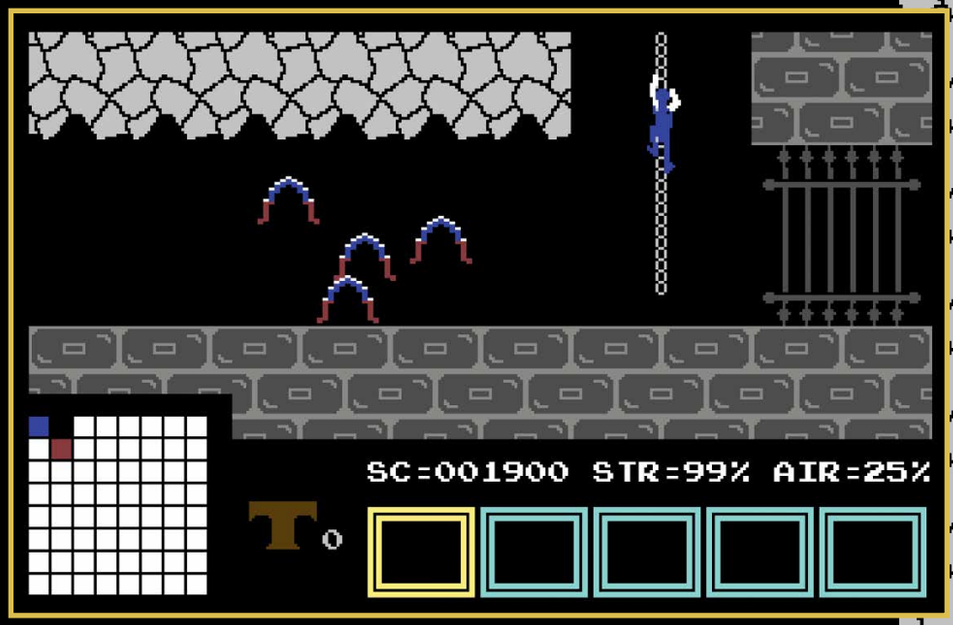
David Jones' awesome sequel to the platformer *Finders Keepers* could easily have been a full-price release. It lived up to its claim to be a true graphical adventure by introducing a ground-breaking menu control system called Windimation which allowed players to issue commands without typing.

MASTER OF MAGIC

Developed by Richard Darling, *Master Of Magic* was something of a masterpiece: a thrilling, well-designed, feature-packed RPG accompanied by yet another memorable Rob Hubbard soundtrack. Gamers had to find an immortality amulet by exploring a mysterious world presented through a mixture of text and graphics.

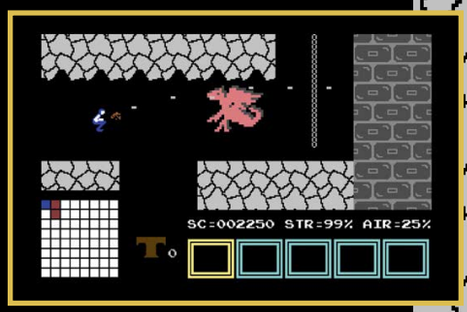
64, it really was hex bytes typed in." This approach was used throughout the game and it also made development efficient. "The walls were made of blocks of characters so they probably only took one byte each," Shaun says. "Each screen also overlapped onto the next one rather than scrolling." Shaun kept another piece of paper by his side, too. "I used to have a sheet for every game showing where in memory I was storing the score, power and so on," he adds. This process ensured Shaun had a game up and running within a short space of time.

Now, it's at this point things become a little hazy again. A poster on the Lemon64 forum, going by the name eregil, came across an early version of *Hero Of The Golden Talisman* called *Labyrinth* that had different screens, enemies and an odd swimming animation. The amazing website Games That Weren't speculated that this may have been a version created for Mr Chip Software prior to it being tidied up and released by Mastertronic. Shaun can't be sure. "Maybe this was intended to be a full-price game but Mastertronic wanted it for its new MAD label and suggested the theming," Shaun speculates. "But how it got leaked, who knows. I read the thread and it didn't seem to come through hackers as such. Maybe I left it on a tape somewhere, maybe the proof version was sent to someone. It's definitely an early version before the released one and definitely mine – I remember the 'gold bags'. Sounds like the swimming animation got some deserved stick too."



» [C64] Much of the game is spent traversing water, climbing ropes and leaping across platforms.

One of the additions following that version was a small-scale representative map added beneath the playing area, making it easier for players to get a sense of their progress. Blue blocks showed areas where all objects had been collected and red areas highlighted areas that had been semi-explored. "The blocky map was probably someone else's suggestion," Shaun says. "But at least it gave you some idea which way to go and where you might have left that final key." ▶



» [C64] There are loads of enemies to dispatch including some fearsome fire-breathing dragons.

KNIGHT TYME

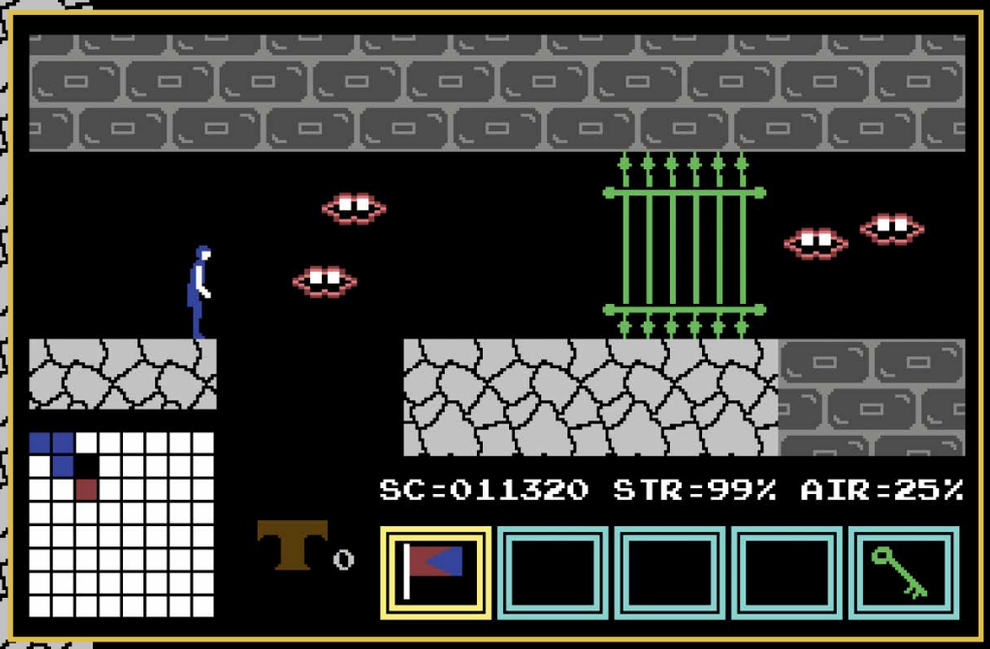
The third game in the *Magic Knight* series, following *Spellbound*, *Knight Tyme* retained the Windimation context-sensitive menu-driven interface of its predecessor but it took the action from mediaeval times to the 25th century. It was also the first game to be specifically designed for the Spectrum 128K.

BANDITS AT ZERO

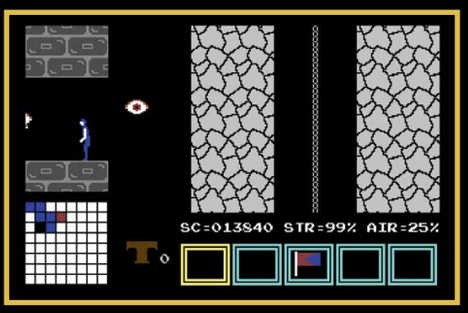
Shaun Southern's horizontal, *Defender*-like shoot-'em-up written exclusively for the Commodore 16 and Plus/4 was a technical triumph given the constraints offered by those systems. Players had to seek and destroy an aircraft carrier in a fast-paced game that boasted smooth parallax scrolling and plenty of action.

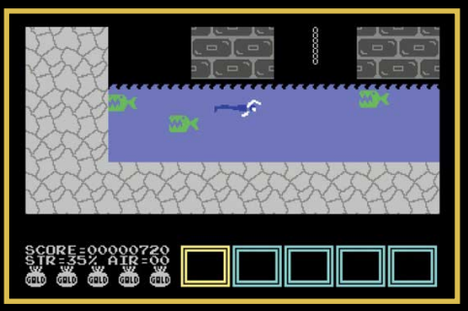
180

Developed by Binary Design, *180* was one of the best darts simulators released for 8-bit computers. As well as having eight colourful opponents and a whole load of humour, this one or two-player game used digitised speech to scream "180" at you if you managed to achieve that coveted score.

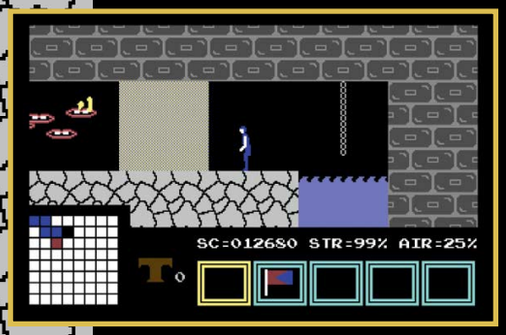


» [C64] Players need to map the game themselves to progress but an on-screen map helps to some extent.





» [C64] This is the "leaked' early version of the *Hero Of The Golden Talisman*, entitled *Labyrinth*.



» [C64] The game has plenty of puzzles to solve but working out the map itself is the main challenge.

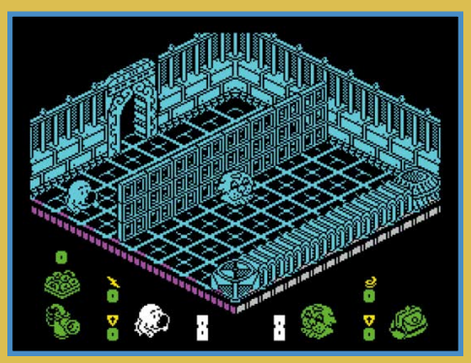
From the start of development, any items that were collected ended up being displayed beneath the playing area too. There were five spaces for objects and, to use one of them, gamers simply needed to cycle through the inventory using the space bar until it ended up in the yellow square. It was a simple, intuitive method that allowed players to better focus on the task in hand without having to spend time wading through menus. For the majority of the time, players would just leave a weapon in the yellow box, allowing them to blast away at the enemies while attempting to work out just where they were and where they were going.

This straightforward approach helped to keep the development time short. "I'm not sure how long the game took to make but it was probably no more than a few weeks," Shaun says. He mentions he didn't spend ages fiddling around once the mechanics and maze were established. "I probably just tweaked the difficulty a bit," he admits.

But then he wasn't looking to produce a mightily difficult game, just one that was hard enough to be challenging and rewarding enough to keep players interested. "Physically to play, it was no more difficult than something like *Donkey Kong* in terms of timing the jumps and running," he says. "But combined with

IT'S MASSIVE!

OTHER 8-BIT GAMES THAT HAD A HUGE NUMBER OF SCREENS



HEAD OVER HEELS

Jon Ritman and Bernie Drummond's isometric classic *Head Over Heels* allowed players to explore more than 300 rooms, with the room data occupying just 5KB of memory. Given the difficulty posed by some of these rooms, navigating the game's expansive world proved a considerable challenge.

UNDERWURLDE

Ultimate Play The Game's platformer featured about 600 interconnected flip-screen areas, forming a large vertical labyrinth divided between a castle and underground caverns. Remarkably, the game was packed into a 48K ZX Spectrum and each of the rooms were individually designed.

THE LEGEND OF ZELDA

The Legend Of Zelda on the NES featured an overworld map made up of 128 individual screens arranged in a 16x8 grid along with hidden areas and dungeons. With the game taking around eight hours to complete, a save function was thankfully included.

learning where you were going, the game gave you a fair bit of 'added' value for your money. The difficulty only really came from it seeming so big to start with and having to explore and learn the map."

The game didn't have much in the way of audio. You could hear the hero's footsteps and the sound of him bouncing off walls. There were sound effects when collecting objects, swimming and firing, too, but it was all functional at best. There was, however, a pleasant rendition of Bach's *Toccata And Fugue In D Minor* as the game's title tune. "I did piano up to grade five and back then I'd often buy some sheet music and code it for my games," Shaun says. "I think this music suited the 'scary' nature of the game."

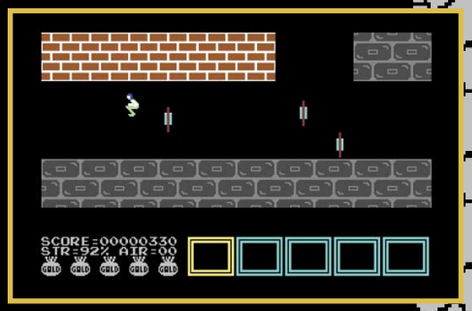
As with the graphics, audio was approached manually. "I think I made a table for each note and what frequency/value had to be put in to make that sound, then either got some sheet music and worked out which two notes had to be played, or wrote it myself, then painstakingly transcribed that into yet more hex digits."

The title screen also contained a long scrolling message that included a self-interview with Shaun – a quirky yet nice touch, not that Shaun would agree. "Lots of games had scrolling messages and I think people humoured me," he says. "I probably had some free memory left. But when I searched for that message recently in a dump of the game... cringe."

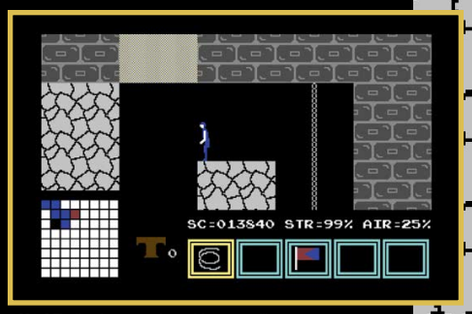
Even so, Mastertronic was impressed. The game's scale and roots in *Impossible Mission* made it a perfect launch title for the publisher's new MAD label alongside *The Last V8*, *Master Of Magic* and *Spellbound*. MAD games were to be sold for £2.99, a quid more than the usual Mastertronic games, and *Hero Of The Golden Talisman* was felt to be great value. Shaun recalls the launch on a boat cruising down the River Thames. "I think the plan was to give the journalists lots of drinks and not let them get off until they had promised to write a good review," Shaun laughs.

As it happens, reviewers were largely in favour of the game. *Zzap!64* praised the title for being easy to get into, calling it a "good arcade adventure" worthy of a score of 78%. And, as time went on, the game became even more appreciated, mainly because it became seen as an early example of the Metroidvania style of games due to its interconnected labyrinth and allowing progression to be unlocked through unique objects and abilities.

If *Hero Of The Golden Talisman* had better sound and graphics, it would have stood alongside full-price releases. As it was, it captured the imagination of many gamers with hours spent mapping the game. "I do wonder how many people had their own big maps on graph paper," Shaun says. "I've seen people mapped it out for magazines." Those people were like heroes to many, helping readers to make the most of a game that proved more influential than even Shaun could have imagined. ★

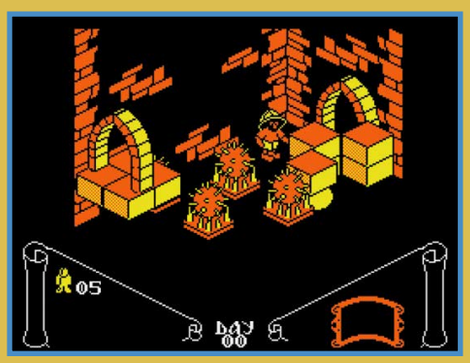


» [C64] *Labyrinth* had many of the elements that were included in the final, published game, but it also had some coloured bricks.



» [C64] Finding items such as this rope will ensure you can navigate through the maze.

"I WANTED TO PUT THINGS IN THE MAZE THAT PLAYERS HAD TO FIND FIRST AND TRACK BACK TO USE"
SHAUN SOUTHERN



KNIGHT LORE

There's no doubt Chris and Tim Stamper, the founders of Ultimate Play The Game, liked expansive titles which is why *Knight Lore*'s castle was made up of 128 single, interconnected, non-scrolling screens arranged in a 3D grid. Each room was drawn one sprite at a time.

TIR NA NOG

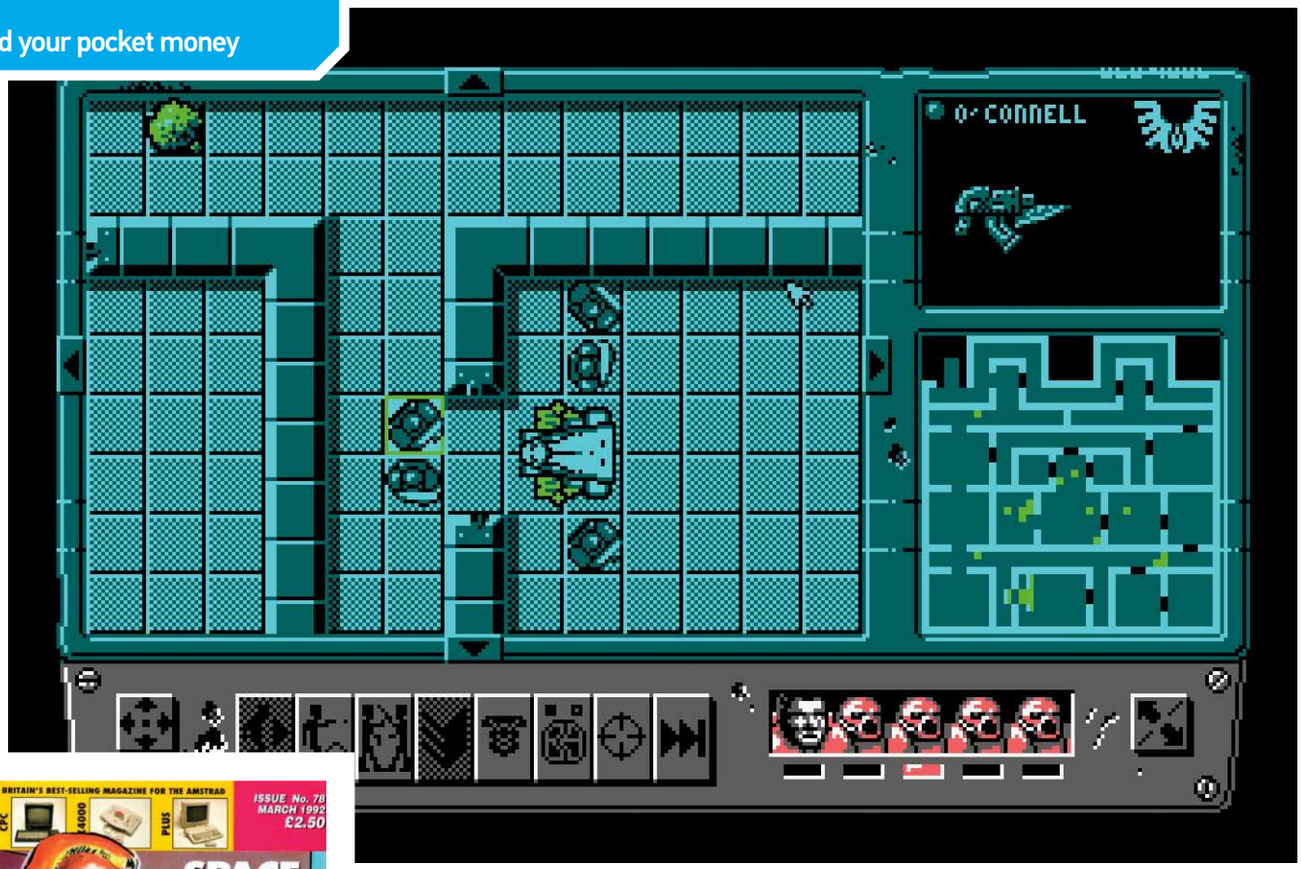
Gargoyle Games' action-adventure title *Tir Na Nog* allowed players to explore a large open landscape and to assist players with their journey, the game came with a full-colour map. The prequel *Dun Durach* wasn't as expansive but it still had 55 streets to navigate.

IMPOSSAMOLE

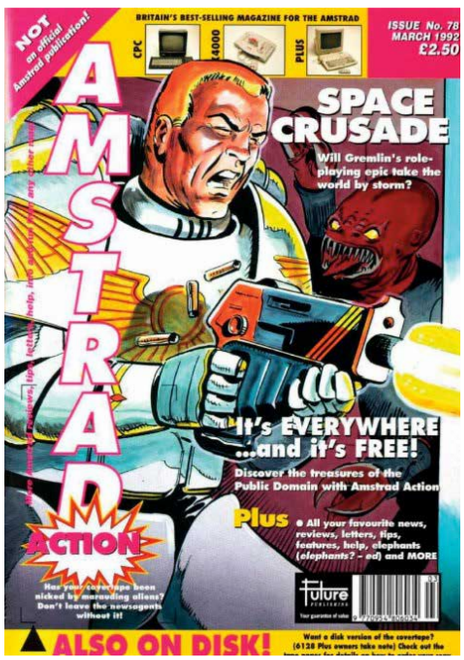
Auf Wiedersehen Monty had 79 interconnected screens laid out like a map of Europe but *Impossamole*, the sixth and final *Monty* entry, upped the ante and proudly marketed itself as having more than two hundred screens "of classical platform gameplay" split across five zones.

Covermount Corner

The best way to spend your pocket money



» [Amstrad CPC] You control your Space Marines from an overhead view, flipping to 3D to view the action.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AMSTRAD ACTION
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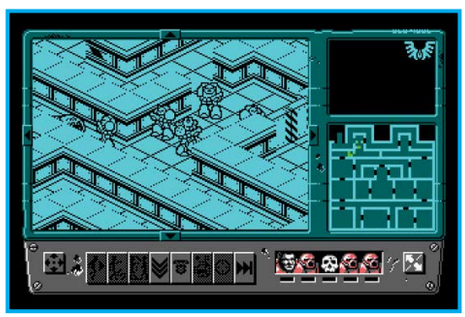
AMSTRAD ACTION #78

MANY GAMING MAGAZINES OUTLIVED THE SYSTEMS THEY COVERED, AND AMSTRAD ACTION WAS FLYING THE FLAG LONG AFTER THE CPC CEASED PRODUCTION. IT WAS STILL PUTTING OUT GREAT COVERTAPES TOO, WITH THIS MONTH'S READERS GETTING TO EXPLORE BOTH A SPACE HULK AND THE PYRAMIDS

WORDS BY JAMES KONIK

THIS MONTH IN MARCH 1992

The 8-bit machines had a loyal following throughout the 16-bit era. The Amstrad had long since ceased production, but *Amstrad Action* was very much alive in March of 1992, with a thriving letters page, and a respectable amount of content. Some publishers were jumping ship. Domark and Virgin had left, and Gremlin was unsure if it would continue after *Space Crusade*, but the schedules were far from empty. This month's tape had an excellent demo, joined by two fantastic full games. The SNES would launch next month, but *Amstrad Action* would entertain its readers until 1995.



» [Amstrad CPC] The lure of chaos has proved too much for one of our heroes, and though swiftly dispatched this unsavoury act of treachery leaves us a man short already.

THE MAIN EVENT: SPACE CRUSADE DEMO

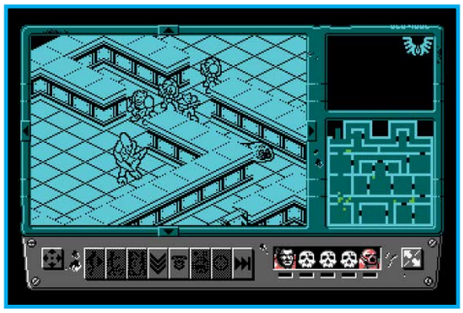
The *Space Crusade* and *Hero Quest* board games were big hits, and a year after *Hero Quest* brought *Warhammer* to home systems, *Space Crusade* followed. Gremlin did a great job bringing Stephen Baker's fun and accessible interpretation of Games Workshop's world to the small screen. You take a Space Marine squad into the depths of a derelict space hulk, on a mission to exterminate a powerful dreadnaught protected by a range of other horrors.

There are Orks and Gretchin as cannon fodder, backed up by androids, Chaos Marines and Soul Suckers, mysteriously standing in for the metal-shredding Genestealers.

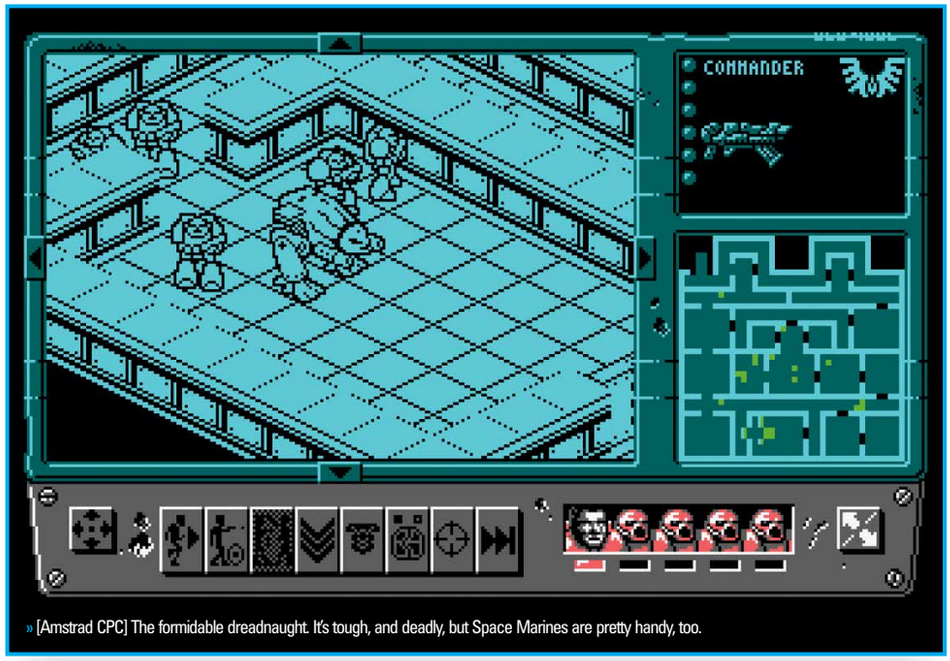
It's slow and tense. Your Blood Angel Marines have a selection of heavy weapons and special equipment to help them, but can easily be picked off, not just by the assorted aliens but by the random events that can cruelly bring any one of them to a swift end. As well as blasting, you can also go close up in hand-to-hand combat. Most troops have a single hit point, but your commander has six, so leading from the front and absorbing most of the heat is essential if you want to keep your squad intact.

You control things from an overhead view and it plays well, just about fitting into

» [Amstrad CPC] Space Marine captains are too hard for helmets. They've got six hit points in any case.



» [Amstrad CPC] The razor-clawed Genestealers have been replaced by the slightly less charismatic Soul Suckers in this game.

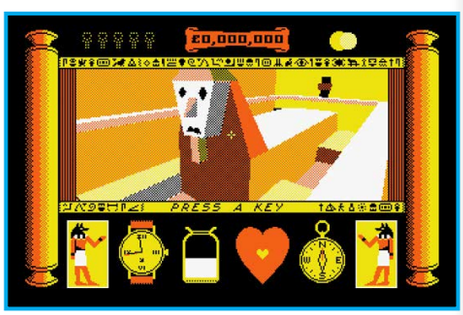


» [Amstrad CPC] The formidable dreadnaught. It's tough, and deadly, but Space Marines are pretty handy, too.

the constraints of 8-bit. There's even an impressive, but slower 3D view of the action you can flip to. The computer handles all the dice rolls, leaving you to pick where to move and what to shoot, and when to use special orders and equipment. The demo mission has a tighter time limit than the full game and takes some beating. In fact, since the demo features all the enemies, it might have left you wondering if you needed the excellent full game, which scored 91% in the mag's review.

PLAY THIS NEXT: TOTAL ECLIPSE 2: THE SPHINX JINX

The Sphinx Jinx was the final game to use Incentive Software's innovative Freescape 3D game engine. As you'd expect it's one of the most polished titles to use the engine. Set among the pyramids, you have to find 12 missing parts of the Sphinx, but have just one hour before the titular eclipse. You navigate rooms full of puzzles and traps with one eye on your watch and another on your precious water. Your heart beats faster as your health drops, forcing you to rest, using up precious time. Solid 3D environments were a rare, if slow treat in the 8-bit era. The environments impress, and you soon adjust to the speed. Incentive would go on to create pioneering virtual reality tool Superscape VRT. ✱



» [Amstrad CPC] The Sphinx gets dismantled at the start of the game, giving you an idea of what to look for.

Covermount HIGHLIGHTS

THE BEST OF THE REST

SHOCKWAY RIDER

■ In Faster Than Light's dystopian vision of the future, you have to navigate the Shockway, a transport system with three lanes moving at different speeds. Looping the whole system wins you kudos, but it's a tough prospect. As well as pedestrians, there are punks out to get you, and even innocent-looking grannies will sometimes turn into enemies.

You can lob bricks and other projectiles to defend yourself, but need to move quickly to avoid the thugs, missiles and obstacles that are all out to bring your trip to a grizzly end. A bit of pre-emptive blasting is sometimes in order, then. It's tight, twitchy, brutally anarchic fun, and great for a quick blast after the slower games on the tape.

DISCCONTENT

■ This month's tape also included a management utility for Amstrad owners both lucky enough to own a disk drive, and diligent enough to want to catalogue them. Gary Barnes, AKA Madwolf's utility is feature rich and lets you customise the colours to help liven things up.

POKES

■ The tape also included a few pokes for gamers who wanted a helping hand. Eight arcade hits were featured, including *After Burner, Operation Wolf, Shinobi, Dragon Ninja, WEC Le Mans, Continental Circus, Cabal* and *Silkworm*. There were also pokes for the movie licences *Red Heat* and *Rambo 3*.

ULTIMATE GUIDE

Disney's Aladdin

WITH THE OFFICIAL GAME BASED ON THE 1992 BOX OFFICE HIT ALADDIN, VIRGIN GAMES CREATED AN EXTRAORDINARY VIDEOGAME ADAPTATION FOR THE MEGA DRIVE, WHICH, THANKS TO SPECTACULAR GRAPHICS AND FUN LEVEL DESIGN, REMAINS ONE OF THE BEST DISNEY GAMES OF THE 16-BIT ERA TO THIS DAY. AND THAT'S DESPITE THE FACT THAT ITS DEVELOPMENT WAS ANYTHING BUT A WALK IN THE PARK

Words By Paul Kautz

IN THE KNOW

- **PUBLISHER:** SEGA
- **DEVELOPER:** VIRGIN GAMES
- **PLATFORM:** MEGA DRIVE
- **RELEASED:** 1993
- **GENRE:** PLATFORMER

Disney's classic animated film *Aladdin* came, saw and took the cinema world by storm during the holiday season of 1992 – raking in more than 500 million dollars worldwide and winning two Oscars for Best Original Score and Best Original Song (*A Whole New World*). The perfect conditions, then, for a videogame adaptation which came out a year later, to coincide with the film's home video release.

The whole thing was created by Virgin Games. Or, to be precise, by the team led by David Perry, who had previously demonstrated with games such as *Cool Spot* and *Global Gladiators* that they were capable of bringing outstanding, hand-animated platformers to market in record time. But they weren't alone, as *Aladdin* saw the formation of one of the most unusual and powerful triumvirates in gaming history, comprising Virgin, Disney and Sega.

"THIS GAME DEVELOPMENT TRINITY WAS A DREAM COLLABORATION, THE LIKES OF WHICH HAD NEVER BEEN SEEN BEFORE"

All parties involved went all-in on this game: Virgin had the game experience and the best developers. Disney was directly involved in the design process and reserved the right to have the final say on all matters. And finally, Sega not only brought its enormous marketing and distribution clout to bear, but also made its combined beta-testing resources available: Sega Of Europe, Sega Of America and Sega Of Japan tested the game simultaneously for weeks on end, which was an incredible first. This game development trinity was a dream collaboration, the likes of which had never been seen before.

Naturally, this put the development team under considerable pressure. But this closeness to the source material brought with it not only very high expectations, but also a number of advantages.

Above all, buyers were getting the best in-game 2D animations available at the time for their money, no other game at the time featured such fluid and varied movements. Contemporary previews, such as those in the *Sega Force Mega* magazine, even speculated that such incredible feats could only be achieved by including an extra chip into the cartridge, as was done with *Star Fox* before. This was not the case, however, as while the *Aladdin* cartridge offered 16-megabits of storage (equivalent to two megabytes) it was otherwise standard in every way. So where on earth did these phenomenal graphics come from? ▶

» [Mega Drive] *Aladdin* is a beautiful game. Even, and especially, from today's perspective.

» [Mega Drive] Unlike in the film, Aladdin wields a sword in the game. To be honest, the throwing apples are the better weapon.

» [Mega Drive] The game is full of delightful and, in some cases, wonderfully silly bonus animations.

Conversion Capers

ONE THOUSAND AND ONE CONVERSIONS

Amiga/PC (1994)

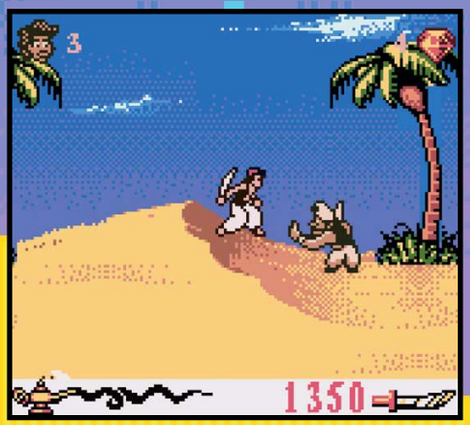
In 1994, *Aladdin* jumped onto the Amiga 1200 and MS-DOS PCs. Graphically it was a step down: the playing field is much smaller, many graphical elements are missing, the VGA and AGA palettes are underused, and the controls are fiddly. These versions are still fun, but quite disappointing.

NES (1994)

The NES port by NMS Software was ambitious, but that's about it. All that remains of the original's stunning graphics is a jerky mess, and the whole thing plays just terribly. There were also various Chinese bootleg versions for the NES, but none of them are worth mentioning.

Game Boy (1994)

The Game Boy version is a port of the NES version and, unfortunately, gets just as much wrong as its big brother. It, too, runs very sluggishly and the controls are extremely unresponsive, which ruins the fun. At least the sprites do stand out a little better here.



Game Boy Color (2000)

This very late conversion of *Aladdin* came out at the height of the Game Boy Color's success, and was, by and large, a port of the dreadful Game Boy version. Only now in colour, with much smoother graphics and significantly improved playability.

Master System/Game Gear

The versions for Sega's 8-bit systems diverge from the Mega Drive original and deliver, well, a racing game. Whilst the versions, which are identical in content (the GG version has a slightly smaller screen area), lack variety, the concept is solid and the game runs remarkably well on the aged hardware.

SNES/GBA

David Perry, "It's a genuinely great game. Classic Capcom polish, wonderful acrobatic platforming, and the parachute trousers are a lovely touch. Thirty years on, people are still arguing about which game is better, and I love that. An argument that's lasted 30 years means both teams did something right."

Revisiting Aladdin

THE BEST WAY TO ENJOY ALADDIN TODAY

The *Disney Classic Games Collection* (available on PC, PlayStation 4/5, Xbox One/Series and Switch) includes three games: *Aladdin*, *The Lion King* and *The Jungle Book*, each in their 16-bit and handheld versions. What makes this collection so interesting, however, is not just the selection of games (and in particular the *Final Cut* version of *Aladdin*, which has been improved in many respects), but above all the bonus material. Developer Digital Eclipse is renowned for its comprehensive preservation of gaming heritage (as clearly demonstrated by titles such as *The Making Of Karateka* or *Atari 50: The Anniversary Celebration*) and has applied the same level of care to this collection. The *Disney Classic Games Collection* features a wealth of behind-the-scenes material for each game, including artwork, level designs on graph paper and video interviews with the developers. Not to be forgotten: the very first, still quite rough version of *Aladdin*, which was presented to the public in June 1993 at CES in Chicago, and subsequently lied dormant in Disney's archives for decades is here, playable in full.

The games themselves have also been brought up to modern standards, with quality-of-life features such as rewind functionality, optional CRT filters, and the ability to save and load at any time. In other words: this is the best way to experience these three games again (or even for the first time) on modern systems. And to learn something in the process too!

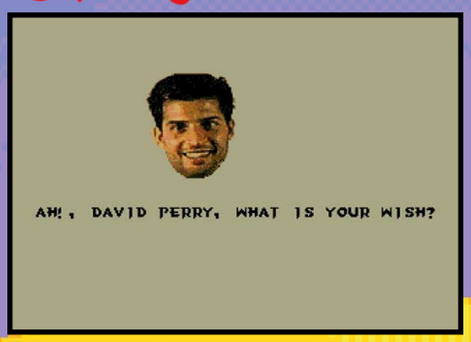
The snakes in the desert stage would have potentially rolled into hoops when Aladdin hit them.
DISNEY CLASSIC GAMES COLLECTION
Jungle Book
Aladdin
LION KING
4750

» [Mega Drive] The level design offers a great deal of variety.

» [Mega Drive] One of the craziest levels takes place inside the magic lamp.

» [Mega Drive] There isn't much of a plot in the game, but what there is follows the film and is presented in nice little cutscenes.

Let's make some magic!

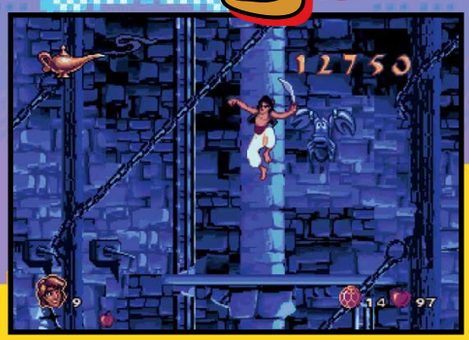


Genie Perry

If you press A C A C A C A C B B B B in the options menu, lead developer David Perry appears as a wish-granting programmer's genie. You'll gain access to a debug menu where you can select levels directly, grant yourself invincibility and access various debug information.

Mouse Magic

In the second level, The Desert, you'll soon come across a small oasis with a clothesline on which a carpet, a pair of underpants and some very familiar looking mouse ears are hanging out to dry. If you position Aladdin directly beneath the ears, you'll be rewarded with a shiny extra life.



They're Everywhere!

It's worth keeping an eye out for details in the backgrounds throughout the levels, as there are plenty of hidden references. Such as skeletons with mouse ears or Ariel's crab Sebastian in Sultan's Dungeon, a Goofy face on a pillar in The Desert, or even a Mega Drive in Inside The Lamp.

The answer: straight from the source. Ten genuine Disney animators from the Florida-based studio Disney Feature Animation, who had already worked on the film, conjured up the animations with their expert hands. This was such an unheard of thing at the time that Disney even issued a separate press release about it, which was picked up by, amongst others, the *Los Angeles Times* on 5 June 1993, which wrote, "Disney Rubs the Video Lamp: The studio finally enters the high-tech interactive market by announcing a partnership to create *Aladdin* – the game."

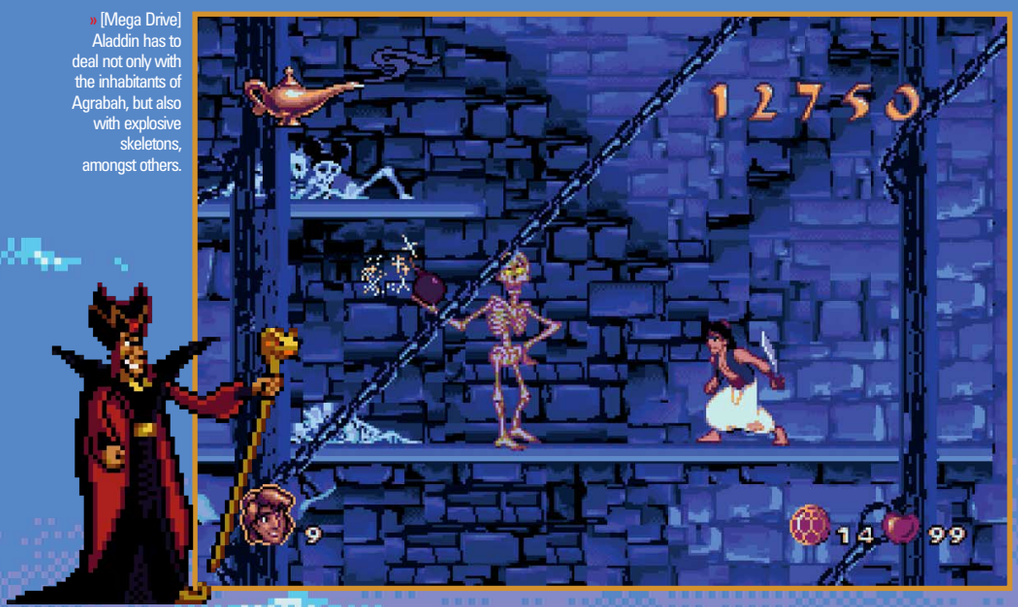
This was the very first time Disney had ever assigned its own staff to work on the graphics for a game. The graphics were created exclusively for the game; nothing was lifted from the film. Drawing the animations alone took over two months. And as they were supplied in black and white, they then had to be digitised and recoloured to match the Mega Drive colour palette, which was the job of Metrolight Studios in Los Angeles. Only then did they reach the Virgin developers to be further processed. To achieve this, David and his fellow programmer Andy Astor developed a technology called Digicel, which, amongst other things, broke down the finalised animations into manageable chunks ranging from 4x4 to 32x32 pixels in size, so that they could be optimally stored in the Mega Drive's memory, whilst also defining the collision detection for every single frame. Every part of every animation frame could thus be utilised to the absolute limit. This made *Aladdin* one of the most graphically impressive 16-bit games of all time. Squeezing all of that into the feeble two megabytes of the cartridge was a mammoth task. And all of it in only about six months, no less.

> "YOU CAN TELL FROM THE VERY FIRST SECOND OF STARTING THE GAME THAT THE DEVELOPERS WERE EXPERIENCED PROFESSIONALS"

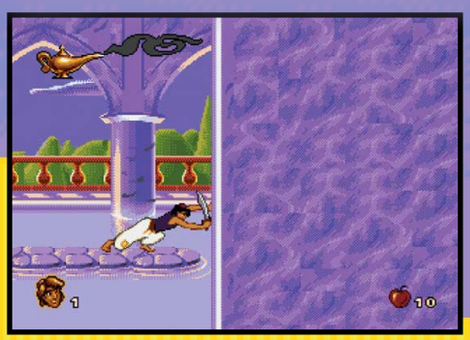
Still, you can tell from the very first second of starting the game that the developers were experienced professionals who had a tight kung-fu grip on the Mega Drive: not a hint of stuttering anywhere, the game moves as smooth as silk in all directions, with plenty of parallax layers providing astonishing depth to the levels. *Aladdin* is a feast for the eyes from the very first second.

And it is also a delight to listen to. Tommy Tallarico and his co-musician Donald Griffin took five songs from the film's soundtrack to adapt for the game, to which Donald then added just as many original compositions in a similar style. These ten full-length MIDI tracks were then adapted by Tommy to

» [Mega Drive] Aladdin has to deal not only with the inhabitants of Agrabah, but also with explosive skeletons, amongst others.



SOME OF THE STRANGE SECRETS IN ALADDIN



Useless Push

Aladdin made full use of its cartridge's 2MB of space. In fact, assets had to be discarded because there was no more space for them. In that respect, it's weird that Aladdin's pushing animation remained in the game, as it serves absolutely no purpose whatsoever throughout the entire game.

An Apple A Day...

Aladdin's apple throw is actually a powerful attack that rivals his sword strike and is also very effective at a distance. However, this isn't the case against all opponents. If they're holding knives or swords themselves, they might simply slice the fruit in half!

Give Peace A Chance

In *Aladdin*, you earn points for all sorts of actions, particularly for collecting items and defeating enemies. But not all enemies – because killing (or rather, making them vanish in a puff of smoke) the guards of Agrabah goes unrewarded. Sooo, violence isn't the answer here?

A Whole New Game

WHAT WE DIDN'T GET TO PLAY

In 2017, a number of staff members at the Video Game History Foundation took the time to examine in detail the source code and original design documents for *Aladdin* that had been unearthed shortly before. Thanks to this, we now know exactly what had to be cut due to time constraints.

There were even more enemies and NPCs, some of which were already fully animated, but had to be omitted due to limited memory space. The same goes for finished animations, such as the Genie, who was supposed to make a brief appearance as a cheerleader, just like in the film. An entire bonus level was cut, with Aladdin appearing disguised as Prince Ali. The same goes for a rock-paper-scissors minigame against the magic carpet.

A version of the game for the Mega-CD was also planned – a sort of director's cut, featuring additional levels and a longer boss battle against Jafar in his evil Genie form. You can catch up on some of this lost content in the *Disney Classic Games Collection*.

» The long-lost CES demo of *Aladdin* contained many more enemies and level designs that didn't make it into the final game.

the Mega Drive sound chip as best he could. And all of this within a mere 175 kilobytes of space available on the cartridge for all the tracks and sound effects. Now, songs like *Never Had A Friend Like Me*, *Prince Ali* and *A Whole New World* are, of course, purely instrumental on the Mega Drive, but still instantly recognisable to fans of the film. And even the new tracks with catchy names as *Camel Jazz* or *Arab Rock* are wonderfully catchy and fit perfectly into the *Aladdin* universe. A bit later, Tommy adapted one of these new songs, the energetic *Rug Ride* (which you hear as you flee the Cave Of Wonders on the flying carpet) for piano and used it as the hold music on Virgin's official telephone helpline for a while.

> "THERE'S JUST NO OTHER WAY TO PUT IT: ALADDIN WAS AND REMAINS A TRULY SPECIAL GAME"

In terms of content, *Aladdin* loosely follows the structure of the film and draws as many ideas from it as possible. You start in the marketplace of Agrabah, traverse the desert, the Sultan's dungeon, the Cave Of Wonders and the interior of the magic lamp, before taking on evil Grand Vizier Jafar in the game's grand finale. The whole thing is linear from start to finish, and also quite short; a playthrough takes little more than an hour. This is stretched out by the fairly high level of difficulty, which was typical for the time.

That didn't, of course, detract from the game's phenomenal success: the press was absolutely thrilled with it; *MEGA*, for example, called it, "A perfect example of what a platform game should be," in its November 1993 issue and awarded it a score of a whopping 94%. Ultimately, *Aladdin* sold more than four million copies, making it one of the most successful Mega Drive games of all time.

There's just no other way to put it: *Aladdin* was and remains a truly enjoyable game. The triumvirate of Disney, Sega and Virgin created something very unique here, which was only possible because three giants joined forces to achieve a common goal. And passionate developers, who poured all of their hearts and souls into a game. The presentation is spectacular in every respect, without the need for any special chips or obscure graphical cloak and dagger, but simply due to the perfect craftsmanship of absolute professionals. All of which resulted in one of the best licensed games of its time. ✱

» [Mega Drive] The final battle is, of course, against evil Vizier Jafar, including his serpent form.

» [Mega Drive] There are only a few boss battles, most of which are surprisingly easy.

» [Mega Drive] Death can come very quickly at times. This is particularly true in the Cave Of Wonders, where Aladdin is chased by giant stone balls.

» [Mega Drive] You can buy extra lives and continue 'wishes' from the peddler.

Developer Q+A

DAVID PERRY LETS THE GENIE OUT OF THE BOTTLE

How did you get the assignment to develop *Aladdin*?

Our previous work, including games like *Global Gladiators* or *Cool Spot*, spoke for itself. Virgin's president, Martin Alper, negotiated a three-way deal between Disney, Virgin and Sega in early 1993. Disney would supply the animation, we would build the game, and Sega would publish and market it. That structure was unheard of at the time.

How much creative freedom did you have during development?

We had a lot of freedom on the gameplay side and very little on the "is this *Aladdin*?" side, which is exactly how it should be. The brief was simple: the game has to feel like the movie. But Disney kept a close eye on everything. We sent them builds regularly, and Jeffrey Katzenberg [then CEO of the Walt Disney Company] was personally involved, which shows just how seriously Disney took it.

Did you get any direct reference material from the film?

Better than reference material, we got actual Disney animators, who drew around 1,400 frames of original pencil animation specifically for us, working within our sprite constraints. That had never happened before. Every run, jump and sword swing Aladdin makes in the game is genuine Disney hand-drawn animation, digitised through our pipeline. We also received colour copies of the film's backgrounds and the character model sheets.

What was the biggest challenge you faced while developing *Aladdin* on the Mega Drive?

Squeezing a Disney film into a cartridge. Feature animation involves thousands of drawings with unlimited colours, and the Mega Drive gives you a tiny ROM budget, strict sprite limits and a small colour palette. Our whole job was to make sure you didn't notice any of that. So it was compression, compression, compression, plus a whole host of animation tricks: holding frames, looping cycles, flipping sprites, palette tricks, anything that let the animation feel lush while the hardware stayed within budget. And it all had to keep running fast, because a Disney game that chugged would have failed instantly.

The other challenge was time. We built the entire game in about six months, because it had to be on the shelves alongside the film's home video release in October 1993. There was no room for a single wasted week. Honestly, that deadline shaped the game just as much as the hardware restrictions did.

Nightbreed: The Interactive Movie

BE GONE YE, FOUL DEMON!

» AMIGA » 1990 » IMPACT SOFTWARE

Imitation is the sincerest form of flattery, so they say. When writing about Cinemaware for last month's issue, I remembered some of the games that blatantly tried to copy Cinemaware's trademark style. Ocean Software published two such titles in 1990. The first was *The Lost Patrol*, a really excellent arcade-inspired adventure set during the Vietnam War that I'd recommend to anyone. The second was this, a game based on Clive Barker's dark horror movie that gave me nightmares for all the wrong reasons.

I got this game with my Amiga 500 as part of the *Screen Gems* bundle that featured two other movie tie-ins – *Days Of Thunder* and *Back To The Future II*. Those two games were downright bad, but *Nightbreed* was something else; a maddening curiosity. It looked great, with graphics befitting an interactive movie. And the story was solid, being based on Barker's movie and novel before it. But whereas the Cinemaware games allowed you to make mistakes, here you were always just one mouse-click away from 'game over'.

Right at the beginning of the game, you arrive at a cemetery and you're given three options: enter graveyard, look around, or enter Midian (which is where the 'Breed live). Choosing the second or third option results in instant death. Choosing the first is a fate worse than death. On entering the graveyard, a chap named Peloquin tries to rip your throat out. The only way to escape is to outrun him, which involves tapping the mouse buttons or waggling the joystick. To be honest, I'm not sure what you're supposed to do, because that wild-haired dude is rapid and he'd catch me every time. Looking at the game manual reveals some advice, "You must press fire in time with each arm at its highest point… this will increase your running speed." Nope. Tried this. Doesn't help. It's like an awful nightmare where something is chasing you and your legs won't cooperate.

It is possible. I did escape a couple of times, but at the next junction I chose the wrong option and died. Apparently when you finally enter Midian, the game turns into a *Dungeon Master*-style adventure. I'll never know. I stuck the game on a shelf and played *It Came From The Desert* instead. ✱

THE MAKING OF AZRAEL'S TEAR

ONE OF THE MOST ATMOSPHERIC YET UNDERRATED PC GAMES OF THE MID-NINETIES, AZRAEL'S TEAR WAS A FIRST-PERSON REAL-TIME 3D ADVENTURE SET IN AN UNDERGROUND TEMPLE. DEFEAT THE TEMPLAR KNIGHTS, DINOSAURS AND GHOSTS, SOLVE PUZZLES, GRAB THE HOLY GRAIL AND ESCAPE

WORDS BY RICHARD C HEWISON

NE · · E · · SE · · S
suggests mine working - 2 exits detected
DNASCAN - human species detected - some cellular mutation detected - catalyst unknown
WARNING - MS2 HUD unit detected - ID - Lincoln - weapons systems armed - subject has violent record - APPROACH WITH CAUTION
Small amount of system damage substained in fall.

» [PC] You're not the only person here, and he's definitely not a friend!

IN THE KNOW

- **PUBLISHER:** MINDSCAPE
- **DEVELOPER:** INTELLIGENT GAMES
- **PLATFORM:** PC
- **RELEASED:** 1996
- **GENRE:** 3D ADVENTURE

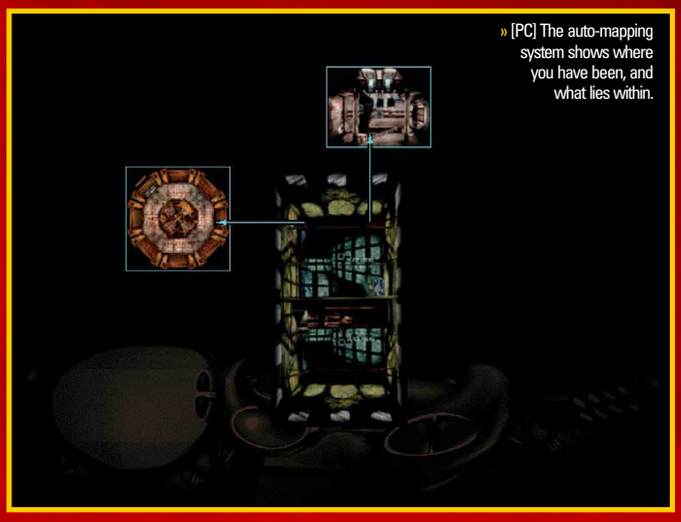
Matthew Stibbe was an Oxford graduate with a BA (Hons) in history. He was also a highly respected designer and programmer of EA's *Imperium*, and Domark's *Nam 1965-1975*. Matthew's compact development team in London was called Intelligent Games (IG), and they created *Sim Isle* for Maxis, *Ticonderoga* for Mindscape and researched scenario designs for the Microprose titles *Fields Of Glory* and the *UMS II Planet Editor*.

Australian Ken Haywood had a burning desire to write a novel about a futuristic heist to discover and steal the biblical Holy Grail. "Around 1993 I was living and working as a graphic designer in Winchester, England and I had a series of ideas that eventually became *Raptor*, which is Latin for 'thief'. The storyline combined ancient Templars, the Grail, dinosaurs, a strangely powerful meteorite and a prophesied 'holy thief'. As I researched more, and the story became more layered and complex, I realised it would work best as a computer game."

Ken wasn't a gamer and knew little about the industry, but he adapted his story to fit. "I then created an illustrated presentation detailing the game history, characters and storyline, and started shopping *Raptor* around," he adds. Ken approached John Cook at the Bad Management agency and John took the idea to Matthew at IG to develop the idea further.

"John had been involved with Maxis, and I knew him from our work on *Sim Isle*. He was a good guy," says Matthew. Ken's design document was ambitious, and once it landed with the developer, John Cook approached several publishers before signing a deal with Mindscape, through its UK branch based in Burgess Hill, near Brighton. Back at IG, Ken moved to London and worked with the team to reshape *Raptor* into a plausible 102-page game design.

"We turned Ken's original ideas into more structured proposals and designs," says Matthew. "Richard Guy and Richard Evans were very important in that process. Richard



» [PC] The auto-mapping system shows where you have been, and what lies within.

DEVELOPER HIGHLIGHTS

IMPERIUM
PLATFORM: ATARI ST, AMIGA, PC
RELEASED: 1990

USS TICONDEROGA
PLATFORM: PC
RELEASED: 1994

DUNE 2000 (PICTURED)
PLATFORM: PC, PLAYSTATION
RELEASED: 1998

-auto-
W - - NW - - N - - NE -
ENVSCAN - pillars - sharpened spears - PENSCAN - complex systems of gears and levers - SUGGEST - holding area - 4 exits detected
WARNING! - movement sensors active - analysis 1 subject too large for human species
WARNING! - unidentified saurian ahead - size of large crocodile
Page - Apr 1194

» [PC] A trapped dinosaur might have to be sacrificed to make progress.

» [PC] This ghost might be willing to give you help in your hour of need.

» [PC] Several clues are scattered throughout the game, waiting to be discovered.

Guy also did some work to turn the game into a paper-and-pencil desktop RPG, and we played around with that for a while."

Andy Knott and Doug Telford also contributed, and that time honing the design document was well spent. Recent IG recruit Philip Veale also recalls his time working on *Raptor*. "I had just finished *Ticonderoga*, which was my first professional game. Around that time, I became the technical director at Intelligent Games, but my main day-to-day was still development on the *Raptor* game."

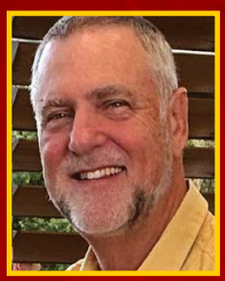
Creating the real-time 3D engine from scratch to run in MS-DOS without the aid of specific 3D graphics hardware proved to be a real technical challenge. "We used Reality Lab's Rendermorphics for our 3D rendering," explains Philip. "We were very much pushing the limits of the technology, and I think that the fact that a lot of the time we didn't stop trying to do new things helped us to push the art to places that most games wouldn't have tried."

Matthew also recalls the seismic shifts that were beginning to impact game development in the mid-Nineties, when 3D was starting to become the go-to games environment and how it changed the technological direction of the *Raptor* game design. "I can't remember the specifics of why it changed. I think it must have reflected the rapidly evolving capabilities of computers at the time. I remember talking to different people about 3D technology. Also, the whole *Myst* style of game was a sort of evolutionary dead end, and the limitations of that genre became clear very quickly."

Raptor had several interim evolutionary and technological changes at IG before the final 3D environment was chosen, as Matthew elaborates. "At one point we had some concept of not just rendering a single view at a time, as in *Myst*, but the view in eight directions at each spot on the floor on the map, perhaps every meter or so. This would allow you to move around the map in a more conventional RPG style and still have high-quality *Myst*-style rendered graphics. I can't remember what became of that idea or why we didn't do it."

One of the neatest aspects of the game was the impressive graphics and use of sound that combined to create a terrific atmosphere. Dark corridors, dripping water, textured walls, floors and creatures in moody 3D were in abundance. Throw in some very professional voice acting, and you had an almost perfect recipe. Allowing the player to select the screen resolution during the game, including an automatic change to a lower resolution when moving forwards and backwards, and then a high resolution when standing still was the cherry on top. The switch was seamless, not interrupting the gameplay. It made the game playable on less capable ▶

"THE STORY BECAME MORE LAYERED AND COMPLEX, I REALISED IT WOULD WORK BEST AS A COMPUTER GAME"
KEN HAYWOOD



■ Ken Haywood returned to Australia and his career as a graphic designer after *Azrael's Tear* failed to find its audience.

■ IG programmer Philip Veale worked on other games (including two *Dune* titles) before joining Slitherine in 2003 as CTO.

■ After selling Intelligent Games in 2000, Matthew Stibbe explored various entrepreneurial pursuits. Today he is CEO of a successful marketing company.

» [PC] Can you trust this mutated human, or should you leave him to his fate?

» [PC] This mechanism is just one of several mechanical puzzles to solve.

» [PC] Exploring one of the many mine shafts that could lead to treasure or danger.

» [PC] Someone has given themselves seven years of bad luck by smashing these mirrors.

PCs, where software running in SVGA was only just starting to become the norm as graphic cards massively changed the landscape for PC gaming.

Ken recalls the impact the shifting 3D approach had on the game. "The vast spaces that were in the original design became impossible due to memory and processing issues, so the massive temple complex became many smaller connected chambers separated by strategically placed gates. The story was altered slightly to work within these sequential gates, where the player had to solve key puzzles to pass through these gates to move further inside."

"Around that time, the whole company spent a lot of time playing first-person shooter games in multiplayer mode," adds Matthew. "That must have also been hugely influential in everyone's thinking. Not mine so much. I was rubbish at that first-person shooter style of game, and I still am!"

> "WE WERE VERY MUCH PUSHING THE LIMITS OF THE TECHNOLOGY"
> **PHILIP VEALE**

With *Raptor* development well underway, the programming team at IG briefly experimented with the new 3D capable graphic cards, as Philip recalls. "We had a version running on the very first 3D cards that were just peeking over the horizon, but we couldn't make the game work because of the very small amounts of memory those cards had at the time."

Key game moments involved switching from real-time 3D-rendered environments to a short video sequence, creating more work for Philip. "I ended up writing a custom video compressor and renderer because the FLV files were not able to give us the quality and playback speeds that we needed."

As *Raptor* approached completion, Mindscape felt that a new name was required. However, changing the title to *Azrael's Tear* was something that Matthew was never happy with. "I'm sure the decision involved Mindscape, Ken, John and us. I have very vague memories of the discussions. *Azrael's Tear* as a thing is embedded in Ken's storyline. The Grail is made from this mystical material that fell to Earth," says Matthew. "But if I could turn back time and change one thing it would be the name. What were we thinking? It's hard to pronounce and doesn't describe the gameplay. Respect to Eidos for *Tomb Raider*, as that does exactly what it says on the tin!"

Whatever the reason, the game title was changed quite late in the day, after Ken Haywood had moved back to his native Australia. "Many other names were considered, but *Azrael's Tear* has actually grown on me over time, as I think it reflects the game's quirky individuality," admits Ken with a few decades of hindsight.

CHASING THE GRAIL

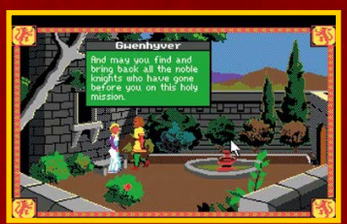
THE HOLY GRAIL HAS BEEN THE SUBJECT FOR SEVERAL GAMES...

INDIANA JONES AND THE LAST CRUSADE

■ Based on the epic third *Indiana Jones* movie released in 1989, the game expanded the story in several places. This classic point-and-click graphical adventure was developed using LucasArts' SCUMM system. Control Indy as he attempts to defeat the Nazis and find the Holy Grail.

BROKEN SWORD: SHADOW OF THE TEMPLARS

■ Revolution Software really hit its stride with this graphic adventure for various platforms. Near cartoon quality graphics and animation, professionally acted speech for CD-based systems and an intriguing plot. The Holy Grail connection isn't revealed until later.



CONQUESTS OF CAMELOT: THE SEARCH FOR THE GRAIL

■ Another point-and-click graphic adventure from Sierra. Published in 1990, this was the first of its *Conquests* series, and the PC game was steeped in the legends of King Arthur, Gwenhyver and yes, the quest for the Holy Grail.

MONTY PYTHON AND THE QUEST FOR THE HOLY GRAIL

■ A CD-ROM game for Windows based on the classic comedy film *Monty Python And The Holy Grail*. Plenty of subgames, with one based on *Tetris* but with a hilarious twist. This game is worth seeking out, unless you've already got one.

» [PC] Pulling on the rope will lower the ramp and give you access to a new area.

iD Software's *Quake* was released in the early summer of 1996, scant weeks after *Azrael's Tear* was completed and prepared for mastering on CD-ROM. "It was unfortunate timing, releasing our 3D adventure in the same year as *Quake* and *Tomb Raider*, which were both more narrowly focussed genre games and both, of course, hugely successful, whereas our little masterpiece disappeared into obscurity," admits Matthew. "*Broken Sword* also came out in 1996 and that was a more traditional adventure game about the Holy Grail. That also went on to greater commercial success."

IG's 3D adventure game floundered upon release despite positive reviews, but *Azrael's Tear* has a passionate and very loyal following to this day, and the team at IG can be extremely proud of how the game turned out. "It was a genuinely great game. Ken's story was excellent, and I think that it does what any good adventure game should, drawing the player into the story and the characters," says Philip. "It's a real shame that we weren't able to continue the series, especially as we were at the cusp of much more powerful 3D engines. It could have been the basis for a really great series." Ken had also hoped to help create a follow-up. "I began designing sequel concepts, stretching the story into the future while further exploring the key themes." Unfortunately, it was not to be. "I was happy and very proud of the final product," he adds. "That said, I know there were issues which gave some players problems, but all highly ambitious projects have their challenges."

» [PC] A locked door is just one of many obstacles to overcome.

Press right mouse button to
exit book view mode.
Entry 55
April, Year of our Lord 1194 AD
Today, at last, I record the completion of Aeternis.
Seven years of hard, secret toil. The great task
requiring 600 slaves and artisans, and 40
ship-loads of materials. The holy gift of
Gralilstone, of course, sustained our strength
throughout.
The temple is quiet now and Geffrye walks the
empty corridors, his eyes shining with triumph
and devotion; his pride well justified.
We now await a delegation of Templar and
Priceré dignitaries to inspect our work.
Tonight, all celebrate, including the slaves.
They now sleep, drunk, in the ships. Tomorrow,
as ordered, they will be taken to sea and drowned.

» [PC] Examining objects and picking them up is all part of the game.

Ken had also hoped to help create a follow-up. "I began designing sequel concepts, stretching the story into the future while further exploring the key themes." Unfortunately, it was not to be. "I was happy and very proud of the final product," he adds. "That said, I know there were issues which gave some players problems, but all highly ambitious projects have their challenges."

And what happened to Ken's original idea of writing *Raptor* as a novel? "I returned to Australia in 1995 believing the game would be a success," starts Ken. "The release was still some way off, so I worked on producing a book and eventually found a potential publisher and writer. Regrettably the novel got cancelled when the game failed commercially."

Azrael's Tear did leave a legacy though. "I worked on a lot of games over the decade or so that I was in the games industry," reflects Matthew. "*Azrael's Tear* is the only one that generates any historical interest and it's the only one that generated any fan mail. The story, the puzzles and the immersive experience made a lasting impact on the people who played it, and that's immensely satisfying for me." ✱

Richard C Hewison wrote the game manual for *Azrael's Tear*.

THE NEXT CRUSADE

WHAT HAPPENED AFTER THE QUEST FOR THE GRAIL FINISHED?

■ Despite *Azrael's Tear* suffering commercial failure, IG developed a spiritual successor called *Dark Hermetic Order* (*DHO*), as Matthew Stibbe explains. "It was with the same team, and we started work on it after *Azrael's Tear* shipped. It got to quite an advanced stage of development with several playable levels, including a Mexican village with chickens and an underground station. It was much more of a 3D shooter but with magic." Philip Veale also recalls the work they put into the new game with great enthusiasm. "It was a lot of fun. The game used a new engine that I wrote where everything was done in software. The graphic artists were then able to do some pretty cool things with it." Most of the storyline for the new game came from IG's Kevin Shrapnell, and what they developed was definitely 'out there'. "I'd forgotten how off the wall *DHO* was," admits Philip. "We had machine-gun-wielding Celtic or Arthurian warriors and robot samurai. It was pretty bonkers, with skinned bodies wandering around, a giant wicker man throwing fireballs, and lots of other weird stuff." Unfortunately, despite good progress the game was cancelled by IG's new publisher before the studio could finish its work.

» [PC] *Dark Hermetic Order* wasn't a sequel but had the same development team behind it

ZYBEX

ZYBEX WAS A BUDGET SHOOT-'EM-UP, BUT IT WAS MORE THAN THE SUM OF ITS PARTS. FAST ACTION, SIMULTANEOUS TWO-PLAYER GAMEPLAY AND AN UNFORGETTABLE SOUNDTRACK COMBINED TO CREATE ONE OF THE MOST FONDLY REMEMBERED ATARI GAMES OF THE LATE-EIGHTIES

WORDS BY MARK SANDERSON

IN THE KNOW

- **» DEVELOPER:** ZEPPELIN GAMES
- **» COMPOSER:** ADAM GILMORE
- **» BEST TRACK:** TITLE TRACK
- **» RELEASE:** 1988
- **» PLATFORM:** ATARI 8-BIT, C64
- **» GENRE:** SHOOT-'EM-UP

If being a convict on the run from execution in an intergalactic prison sounds grim, you've clearly never stood on the seafront at Whitley Bay in the depths of winter. There, the wind barrels in off the North Sea with enough force to send a man straight to Hell. The former, of course, is the premise of *Zybex*, the 1988 shoot-'em-up. The latter is the location of the teenage bedroom where *Zybex*'s composer, Adam Gilmore, wrote the game's soundtrack.

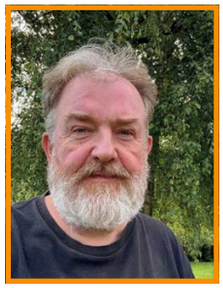
The story of *Zybex* is rooted in the north-east and the computer club culture that flourished across Britain during the mid-Eighties. In the years leading up to working on *Zybex*, Adam had spent time trying to coax music from a ZX81, a machine whose audio capabilities amounted to little more than a collection of beeps and chirps. Creating music on it was like trying to write a symphony using a few spoken-word samples from R2-D2.

Looking for something more capable, he joined Wallsend Computer Club, where enthusiasts gathered in a community centre back room around tables piled high with computers, cables and disk drives. It was there that he met Derek Brewster, founder of Zeppelin Games. Derek stood out immediately. For a start, he had a moustache. More importantly, he was looking for someone to compose the music for a new shoot-'em-up called *Zybex*.

Adam had produced a series of music demos that had attracted attention within the local computer scene and was approached by Derek to work on *Mission Jupiter*.

The success of that collaboration led to further commissions for the first titles released by the newly established Zeppelin Games, including *Zybex*. It was the opportunity that transformed a hobby into professional game development.

Zybex appeared on both the C64 and Atari. While the C64's SID chip has achieved near-mythical status among retro enthusiasts, Adam remains a passionate advocate for Atari hardware. "The Atari was a great machine for music," he says. "It had four channels. If you mixed two of them together you could get really powerful and punchy bass lines."



Adam Gilmore started making music in the Eighties for the budget publisher Zeppelin Games and scored the likes of *Simon The Sorcerer* and *Draconus*. He currently works as a software development consultant.

» [Atari 8-bit] *Zybex*'s intense action was fuelled by Adam Gilmore's superb music.

» [Atari 8-bit] *Zybex* doesn't just sound superb, it looks great too with some lovely pixel art.

» [Atari 8-bit] There are lots of challenging attack waves to manage in Zeppelin's game.

» [Atari 8-bit] The colour scheme may look garish but the action is intense.

A keen bass player and heavy metal fan, he had practically worn out his cassette copy of Iron Maiden's *Powerslave*. Steve Harris' trademark galloping bass style left a lasting impression, which can still be heard throughout *Zybex*. His fondness for Atari hardware also leads him to challenge another retro sacred cow: the Amiga. "People did amazing things on the Amiga, but before that we'd had sound chips with real character. You could tweak them and push them around. The Amiga was mostly playing back samples. It was sequencing recordings. The 8-bit sample sound quality wasn't always that great."

> "I'D WRITE MUSIC ON A CASIO CZ-101 SYNTHESISER AND TYPE IT DIRECTLY INTO THE SOURCE CODE"
> ADAM GILMORE

Yet appreciating the Atari's sound and getting music out of it were very different things. Creating music for the machine in the late-Eighties bore little resemblance to modern production. There were no digital audio workstations, no visual editors and no MIDI sequencing. One of the biggest challenges was simply getting the music into the computer.

"I just used an Atari Macro Assembler with my own 6502 music player," Adam explains. "I'd write music on a Casio CZ-101 synthesiser and type it directly into the source code."

Later he upgraded to a Kawai K1 synthesiser and a Yamaha RX17 drum machine. The technology changed, but the process remained largely the same: compose the music, convert it into data and painstakingly enter it into the game by hand.

The Atari itself added another layer of complexity. Its POKEY sound chip offered four audio channels, but composers soon discovered that combining channels could unlock capabilities beyond those available on paper. Pairing channels could produce deeper bass sounds or reach higher frequencies, but the technique came with compromises. "You didn't get such fine control on the Atari," Adam says. "Sometimes things would drift out of tune. You'd combine channels to get higher frequencies, but the higher the note, the greater the risk of it going a bit wild."

There was also the challenge of time. Zeppelin specialised in budget games and released them at a relentless pace. Deadlines were often measured in days rather than months. "Anyone doing creative work has two problems," Adam says. "Starting and finishing. You'd get a call and it was basically, 'We need this by Monday.'"

Fortunately, he thrived under pressure. Being based in the north-east gave him an advantage many freelance composers lacked. Rather than receiving little more than a title and a vague brief, Adam could jump on the Metro, visit Zeppelin's offices in Newcastle, see projects taking shape and discuss ideas directly with the developers before heading home to compose.

The resulting soundtrack became one of the game's defining features. Built around driving bass lines and energetic melodies inspired by heavy metal, it helped reinforce the speed and intensity of *Zybex*'s action. Contemporary reviewers responded enthusiastically. *Atari User* awarded the game's sound a perfect ten out of ten, while players continue to cite the music as one of the reasons the game remains so fondly remembered among Atari enthusiasts.

It stands as a reminder of a time when game composers were often equal parts musician, programmer and engineer. Long before modern software removed most of the technical barriers, they were finding ways to make modest machines sing. *Zybex* remains proof that a budget game could be greater than the sum of its parts, and that with enough ingenuity, four Atari sound channels were all Adam Gilmore needed to make the machine roar. ✱

CHALLENGING SOUNDS

Creating music for Atari's 8-bit certainly wasn't easy…

■ The process of making music for games in the late-Eighties was a very different experience from modern composition. Adam Gilmore did not have access to MIDI sequencing, digital audio workstations or graphical music editors. Instead, he would experiment on a synthesiser, develop a bass line, melody and chords, then enter the music directly into his own 6502 music player as strings of hexadecimal data.

The process sounds laborious, but Adam became so familiar with the format that typing music into source code soon became second nature. Most tracks began with a rhythm or chord pattern which he gradually expanded into a complete piece. Sometimes the inspiration came from creating a new sound effect or instrument patch rather than the melody itself. Working under tight budget-game deadlines, he could often complete an entire soundtrack, sound effects included, in little more than a day.

THE EVOLUTION OF STAR WARS EPISODE I RACER

THE SUCCESS OF EPISODE I: RACER AND ITS COIN-OP COUNTERPART STAR WARS: RACER ARCADE LED TO THE PS2 SEQUEL STAR WARS: RACER REVENGE, AND MORE RECENTLY STAR WARS: GALACTIC RACER. THE PRODUCERS OF THE FOUR GAMES RECALL HOW THE SERIES EVOLVED

WORDS BY RORY MILNE

» [Nintendo 64] The zero gravity tunnels of *Episode I: Racer's* Vengeance track have a Death Star trench run feel.

» [Nintendo 64] *Episode I: Racer*'s Tatooine training level pays tribute to the film scene the game was inspired by.

» [Nintendo 64] The frozen wastelands of the Howler Gorge course bring to mind the Battle Of Hoth.

Given how popular racing games were during the early decades of videogames, it seems odd that there weren't any *Star Wars* racing games until the end of the Nineties. The explanation lies in an approach taken by Lucasfilm where games set in its *Star Wars* universe either focussed on or were built around events from the films. These hadn't featured racing, so neither did the games. That all changed in late-1997, when producer Jon Knoles finished work on the PC port of *Star Wars: Shadows Of The Empire* with co-producer Eric Johnston. Soon after, they took inspiration from concept art for the next *Star Wars* film.

Jon explains how this meant reassessing their ideas for their next project while repurposing aspects of their previous one. "We took forward a lot from *Shadows*. The low altitude flight was the most successful part of that game, so we were experimenting with space flight that would transition magically to planetary flight. That was around the time we saw the concept art for *Episode I*. Our eyes went immediately to the Podrace sequence, and we thought there was a game there. So I built some 747 engines with little Pods in 3D Studio Max, and Eric used the tech for the cable wrapping around the walkers in *Shadows* to get bendy cables to work for the Podracers, because you really couldn't sell that fantasy without segmented cable. Then just like I had built the world of Hoth for *Shadows* I built the Tatooine arena from the concept art."

The use of *Episode I*'s desert wasteland racing as the basis for a game meant LucasArts reflecting the scene's blistering speeds and high adventure. So Jon and his team incorporated dogged AI competitors, and took inspiration from earlier games and *Star Wars* films. "We populated the edges of the tracks with as much cheap geometry as we could just to have things whipping by, because that was the thing you got from the trench run and the Speeder bike chase scenes. *Episode I: Racer* became a lot like the films because it was a race against the environment. We struggled to make door-to-door racing because the speeds were just so extreme, so there was magnetic rubber banding where you could push the AI off their path, but ▶

> "WE SAW THE CONCEPT ART FOR EPISODE I. OUR EYES WENT IMMEDIATELY TO THE PODRACE SEQUENCE, AND WE THOUGHT THERE WAS A GAME THERE"
>
> **JON KNOLES**

THE INTERVIEWEES

■ The producer of *Star Wars Episode I: Racer* Jon Knoles worked on various *Star Wars* and *Forza* titles.

■ Long after producing *Star Wars: Racer Arcade*, Kenji Sasaki is director of his own studio Bitster Co Ltd.

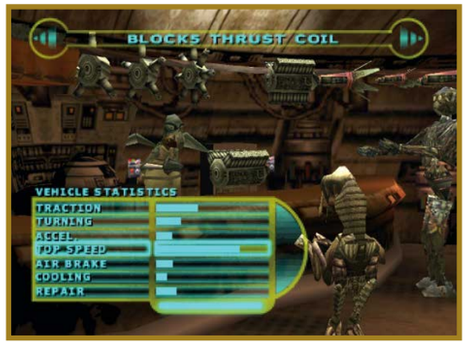
■ Great Wolf Resorts' executive creative director Jordan Itkowitz co-produced *Star Wars: Racer Revenge*.

■ *Star Wars: Racer Revenge* co-producer Brian Coonce is now an executive creative director at Uber.

■ Fuse Games founder/CEO Matt Webster was instrumental in the development of *Star Wars: Galactic Racer*.

■ Executive Producer Craig Derrick led the creation of *Galactic Racer* from the Lucasfilm Games side.

» [Nintendo 64] The dimly lit night racing in *Episode I: Racer* is revisited by subsequent releases in the series.



» [Nintendo 64] Watto's junk shop from the *Episode I* film is the place to buy Podracer parts in LucasArts' game.

» [Arcade] The Easy stage in *Racer Arcade* is set on Tatooine, reflecting the Podracing in the *Episode I* film.

STAGES OF EVOLUTION: RIOTOUS RIDES

MEMORABLE CRAFT FROM THE STAR WARS RACER SERIES

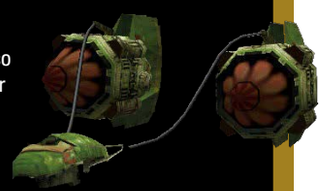
PLUG-F MAMMOTH

Sebulba's Podracer from *Episode I*'s Boonta Eve Classic race was built for speed rather than manoeuvrability. Its burnt orange hue and 'split X' shaped engines give it an iconic look, however the illegal Tradium fuel that powers them leaves them vulnerable to spontaneous internal combustion.

BT310 QUADRA

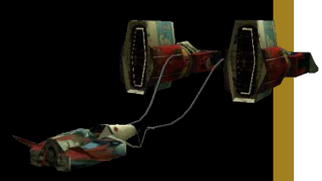
Made famous for all the wrong reasons when it exploded prior to the Boonta Eve Classic, the BT310 Quadra nevertheless has some impressive features. Although it's slow to accelerate, it excels at taking corners. Then once it reaches its top speed it can briefly be boosted by another third.

ORD PEDROVIA



Not just flown but also designed by Podracer pilot Gasgano, the Ord Pedrovia has incredible acceleration and a decent boost. The downside to boosting the craft is that it doesn't have a capable cooling system, which makes boosting it something to only consider if it's absolutely required.

VULPTEREEN 327



While it may not be the fastest, the Vulptereen 327 has decent speed. It's not that manoeuvrable, but it does grip the track well. Where it shines is with its impressive defensive qualities; it can take a real beating and keep going, which makes it the ideal craft for taking out opponents.

▶ they would always come back. The games that were inspirations for me were *Top Gear Overdrive* and *Beetle Adventure Racing*. They just had beautifully executed levels and worlds to explore; they were like adventures in a car."

The design of *Episode I: Racer*'s vehicles and its competitors was just as important as its gameplay. Jon notes the two aspects of this challenge: adapting craft and characters destined for the film and creating new models of Podracers and their pilots especially for the game. "The models for the film were not entirely built, so we had to build a lot of them off the sketches from its artists. They were turning out very unique-looking Podracers. That was awesome, but it made things even more challenging for us because we were hurrying to catch up with something that would be done towards the end of the film. I remember us designing Jinn Reeso and Cy Yunga. Their names were a play on words of the two artists who created them: Clint Young was Cy Yunga and Jim Rice was Jinn Reeso. Having made so many Podracer pilots they were in the zone of understanding the aesthetic and making them look as if they could have been in the film."

> "WHILE THE TATOOINE COURSE WAS THE MAIN FOCUS, WE ASKED LUCASFILM IF WE COULD CREATE ORIGINAL STAGES THAT DIDN'T APPEAR IN THE FILM, AND THEY READILY AGREED"
>
> KENJI SASAKI

One character who did make an appearance in the film was the parts trader Watto. Jon was instrumental in allowing players to buy upgrades from him between races, which strengthened the connection to the film and provided character interaction. "We were trying to add some depth to the game so it wasn't just racing all the time. It started with this idea that you would have upgrades and parts, and you would need to replenish some that were damaged. We ended up cutting that part because it was fun to fix things on the fly, just like Anakin did in the film. So you bought new parts from Watto's shop that would help your Podracer turn better, go faster and brake better. Then in the backyard he had some parts that had a roll of the dice to them whether they were going to break earlier because they were much cheaper."

» [Arcade] The Smuggler's Cove track in *Racer Arcade* was designed to contrast with the game's desert courses.

Running parallel to the development of Jon's project was Sega's arcade take on the *Episode I* film's Tatooine Podracing. Its producer Kenji Sasaki points out that his team had far less reference material to base their game on than Jon's team had. "*Episode I* hadn't even been released when we were developing *Star Wars: Racer Arcade*, so no other *Episode I* games – including home console games – existed at that time. That meant that there were no games we could use as references or play during development."

It's difficult to convey the level of anticipation among *Star Wars* fans for *Episode I* before its release, and this was only heightened by Lucasfilm keeping details of the film close to its chest. Kenji explains that this approach even extended to the *Racer Arcade* team. "Lucasfilm was extremely secretive, so we were essentially feeling our way in the dark for most of the development period. We finally received some reference materials towards the end of development, but the in-game footage and scenes in *Star Wars: Racer Arcade* were created based on trailers and other materials that were available to the general public."

Before producing *Racer Arcade*, Kenji had been a designer on *Ridge Racer* at Namco and had then directed *Sega Rally Championship* and *Star Wars: Trilogy Arcade* for Sega. However he notes that none of these coin-ops or any other games helped to inspire his *Star Wars* racer. "At the time we were developing *Star Wars: Racer Arcade* we were not influenced by any existing games at all. We were impressed by the race scenes in *Episode I* that we saw in the trailer, so we aimed to recreate that world and create a game where players could enjoy the thrill of racing. We also developed the game's physics from scratch specifically for this title, rather than using an existing engine."

Although the Tatooine-based race from *Episode I* inspired two of *Racer Arcade*'s four tracks, the coin-op's two other courses had environments designed for them that were in stark contrast to the desert world. Kenji remembers this being a conscious design decision. "While the Tatooine course was the main focus, we asked Lucasfilm if we could create original stages that didn't appear in the film, and they readily agreed. So we created two original stages. We wanted to design courses with a distinctly different feel from the desert of Tatooine, so we made one a ▶

» [Arcade] *Racer Arcade*'s Pixelito Challenge combines natural rock formations with industrial features.

» [Arcade] The Boonta Eve Classic race from the *Episode I* film is the Expert course in *Racer Arcade*.

» [PlayStation 2] While *Episode I: Racer* is all all about speed, its sequel is a high-octane combat racer.

» [PlayStation 2] When you take your competitors out in *Racer Revenge* their race is over; there's no re-spawning.

» [PlayStation 2] Getting caught up in a pack in *Racer Revenge* can result in your Podracer taking serious damage.

mechanical, artificial-looking stage and the other a stage with plenty of water."

The impact of Sega's *Star Wars* game in arcades mirrored the success of *Episode I: Racer* when it appeared on home systems. LucasArts entrusted the sequel to these games to Jordan Itkowitz and Brian Coonce at Rainbow Studios, which Jordan credits to a demo set on Endor. "Brian and I joined Rainbow in 2000 as it was making a transition from PC games to consoles. We had this really cool engine that could do open space. We could do speed. We could do any kind of vehicle with really cool physics. I think our *Speeder* demo opened the door to conversations with LucasArts. There wasn't a racecourse or anything, but you could race the Speeders through a wide open area with big redwood trees. I think that impressed LucasArts enough for it to then come back to us and say that it wanted to do a Podracing game before *Episode II* came out. So Rainbow put Brian and I together to co-lead the project."

Similar to Sega's creation of *Racer Arcade*, Rainbow Studios' *Racer Revenge* was developed with minimal knowledge of the forthcoming *Star Wars* film that the game had to reflect. However, co-producer Brian Coonce does recall getting some crucial pointers from LucasArts. "*Episode I* had just come out and Lucasfilm had announced *Episode II*. *Racer Revenge* was due to come out at the same time as the trailer for *Episode II*. So we could align *Racer Revenge* to *Episode II*, but it couldn't be directly tied to the film because Lucasfilm wouldn't reveal to us what was happening in it. We did know that *Episode II* was going to feature a more adult Anakin, and we were given an early look at pictures of him in costume. Then Jon Knoles was critical with guiding us on how a Podracer functions, and in establishing a sense of canon to that. So that was a really critical hand off from *Episode I: Racer* to *Racer Revenge*."

Aside from getting advice on Podracer handling, Brian and his co-producer Jordan looked to Jon's Podracing original for inspiration. Jordan remembers this resulting in *Racer Revenge* becoming a combat racer that built layers of gameplay on its predecessor's on the fly repair mechanics. "We played *Episode I: Racer* a lot. We were really impressed, but there were a few things that leapt out. One was that you could crash and immediately respawn, and there was almost no penalty. It didn't really feel like the bashing and crashing you saw in the film. So one of our big ideas was that you could be motivated to crash into other vehicles, but you were going to take damage doing it. There was a risk/reward there where if you took too much damage you had to hold down a button to repair your Podracer, which was going to cause you to lose speed. But if you were good at doing it you got a bigger purse at the end."

> "ONE OF OUR BIG IDEAS WAS THAT YOU COULD BE MOTIVATED TO CRASH INTO OTHER VEHICLES, BUT YOU WERE GOING TO TAKE DAMAGE DOING IT"
>
> **JORDAN ITKOWITZ**

Another aspect of *Racer Revenge* that expanded on an element of *Episode I: Racer* was its character roster. Brian considers why some pilots weren't brought back. "I think the characters that we dropped either didn't have enough visual contrast, or maybe even hadn't had enough screen time meaning they weren't as memorable. Then we wanted to introduce some new characters that brought something fresh to the table."

When discussing these new Podracer pilots, Jordan praises their designers and reveals the resourceful method he used to name them. "We had two really talented concept artists working with us at Rainbow: Carlos Sanchez and Andre Kirk. They did concepts for six new aliens and their Podracers. Their artwork was so phenomenal that I remember that somebody at Lucasfilm said they should hire them! I remember we had to come up with names for the new characters, so I sat at home with *Scrabble* tiles laid out on the carpet and arranged them into what sounded like interesting *Star Wars*-y sounding names."

Decades after *Racer Revenge* was released, the *Racer* series has been brought back. Fuse Games CEO Matt Webster explains how *Galactic Racer* evolved. "We started Fuse in 2023, and we were thinking what our next game was going to be. We've got a shared love of racing and of *Star Wars*. We're also fortunate enough to have made *Star Wars* games in the past, so this seemed like fertile ground for us to be focussing our creative attention on. We went to Lucasfilm Games and outlined an idea for a racing game. That was

» [PlayStation 2] Racing aggressively in *Racer Revenge* gets you more funds to spend on Podracer upgrades between races.

STAGES OF EVOLUTION:
COOL COMPETITORS

NOTABLE STAR WARS RACER SERIES COMPETITORS

SEBULBA

A competitor in all the *Star Wars Racer* titles, Anakin Skywalker's sworn rival favours winning at all costs over playing by the rules. Like Anakin, Sebulba won his freedom by winning Podraces. Although a highly skilled pilot, he stacks the odds by illegally equipping his craft with weapons.

TEEMTO PAGALIES

One of the favourites to win the Boonta Eve Classic due to the superior engines of his Podracer, Teemto Pagalies was taken out of the race by a well-aimed shot fired at the pilot by a Tusken Raider. Teemto sustained injuries from the experience but soon recovered and continued to Podrace.

ODY MANDRELL

A Tatooine native and therefore a local hero of the Boonta Eve Classic, Ody Mandrell can lay claim to having a record setting pit droid crew. Unfortunately, an incident with one of his droids getting sucked into his Podracer's engines during a pit stop prematurely brought his race to an end.

BEN QUADINAROS

Despite causing his hastily assembled BT310 Quadra to explode on the starting line of the Boonta Eve Classic, Ben Quadinaros subsequently became a seasoned Podracer pilot. He has regularly raced against Sebulba as their careers have played out through each game in the *Star Wars Racer* series.

STAGES OF EVOLUTION:
WONDERFUL WORLDS
EXOTIC PLANETS OF THE STAR WARS RACER SERIES

TATOOINE

The home world of Anakin and Luke Skywalker, and the planet where Obi-Wan Kenobi became a recluse, Tatooine is defined by its desert wastelands and rock formations. Known for its nomadic Jawa traders and fierce tribes of Tusken Raiders, the planet also plays host to the Boonta Eve Classic.

ANDO PRIME

An ice planet similar to Hoth, although with several distinctions. While Hoth is home to predatory Wampas and docile Tauntaun, Ando Prime is occupied by a monk-like race and migrant mine workers. This eclectic mix delivers Podraces that take in industrial structures and religious artefacts.

MALASTARE

The densely forested planet where Sebulba was born a slave before gaining his freedom as a Podracer. Because of Malastare's heavy deposits of toxic but highly prized fuel, large swathes of the world have been cleared to make space for refineries, and these are where its Podraces take place.

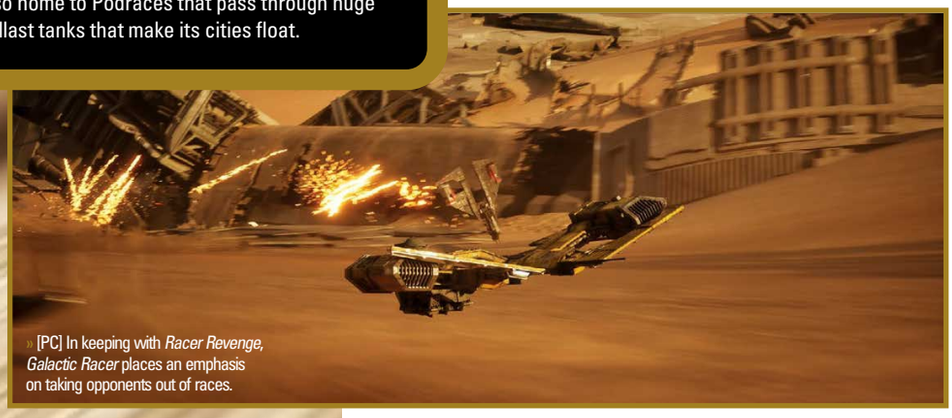
MON CALAMARI

Known as Dac by its indigenous population, this ocean world is where the Rebellion's Admiral Ackbar and Podracer Occo Ninebar come from. Known for its vast coral reefs and Hall Of Heroes, Mon Calamari is also home to Podraces that pass through huge ballast tanks that make its cities float.

» [PC] Like the *Racer* series games before it, *Galactic Racer* features Podracing on a variety of planets.

» [PC] Pit mechanic Hibi fits the upgrades that protagonist Shade earns in races and buys with winnings.

» [PC] *Galactic Racer* wouldn't feel complete without the Boonta Eve Classic, and it's never looked better.



» [PC] In keeping with *Racer Revenge*, *Galactic Racer* places an emphasis on taking opponents out of races.

▶ where it all started. We love racing and we love *Star Wars*, so why not bring those two things together?"

The rich history of *Star Wars* racing games was also considered, as *Galactic Racer*'s executive producer at Lucasfilm Games Craig Derrick points out. "Those games really gave players the opportunity to step into the fantasy of *Star Wars*. *Episode I: Racer* arrived right at the time of the film, and it really gave you the feel of being behind the controls of a Podracer. Whether you played that at home or if you were lucky enough to play the amazing arcade game, those games felt fast, were accessible and unmistakably *Star Wars*. So we have a tremendous amount of respect for them, but for us it was about what we could do next."

What came next was shaped by Fuse's background in racing games, and as Craig notes, by *Galactic Racer*'s place in the *Star Wars* universe. "When Fuse came in with the pitch and the DNA it has that obviously made it a rich conversation. It wasn't really about bringing back *Star Wars* racing games; it was about what a *Star Wars* racing game could be today. We landed on an era after the fall of the Empire. It's the analogue to the end of World War II, where hot-rodding came into vogue. There is Podracing, but this is more a racing adventure game with different vehicles, runs-based progression and a rich story to draw you in."

Giving *Galactic Racer* a post-Civil War setting unleashed a wealth of creative options. Matt outlines the era's key benefits.

"I think that timeline was pretty fertile in that there were stories to tell that hadn't been told. We knew we couldn't make a *Star Wars* racing game without Podracing, but actually the opportunity was to do something broader than that, and so the timeline that we landed on also afforded us that. We wanted to create the Galactic Racing League, and to unify this as a sport. This isn't a wartime story; this is racing after the Galactic Civil War ends with people that are missing the thrill of combat."

> "THIS ISN'T A WARTIME STORY; THIS IS RACING AFTER THE GALACTIC CIVIL WAR ENDS WITH PEOPLE THAT ARE MISSING THE THRILL OF COMBAT"
>
> **MATT WEBSTER**

Some ideas explored in *Episode I: Racer* are more fully realised in *Galactic Racer*. Matt details the game's narrative-driven intermissions. "It's a runs-based racing adventure. Runs-based games are built for infinite replayability, and racing thrives on that. So by bringing those two things together we invented something new. We have a procedural event-based system that allows you to make meaningful and consequential decisions. You're invited to join the Galactic Racing League by its founder Darius Pax. Pax has got a problem. The current league champion Kestar Bool is a prideful, privileged individual with a bunch of racing talent. He's trying to take over the league, so Pax needs your help."

Galactic Racer reflects its lineage by incorporating Podracers while adding other high-velocity, low-altitude craft. Matt reviews the line-up. "If you want to just race Podracers you can do that in a part of the game called Arcade, and you can play online multiplayer Podracing for the first time. The Landspeeders are more akin to cars; they drift around corners. We have Speeder bikes, which have ferocious acceleration and braking. Then we have new vehicles called Skim Speeders, which flow around corners and knife-edge through gaps. These three Speeder types all race together on the same circuits. They've got different racing lines, and where those intersect you take rivals down."

The co-producer of the original *Star Wars* racing game gives a call out to *Galactic Racer* when reflecting on his own work. It's clear that Jon Knoles had a blast making *Episode I: Racer*, and that he's as proud of it as he is of its legacy. "*Episode I: Racer* is one of the best, most polished, most focussed games I've ever worked on. I thought we did a really amazing job in the time we had. The concept art Peter Chan did was beautiful, so I wish we could have done more, but you can only do so much with 2,000 polygons per frame and tiny textures. It's nice to see it still has a following, and it's great to see the new game paying homage to it and finally putting in those graphics that we dreamed of back in those days. People seem to be enjoying its take on a game that had more to do than just racing, so I'd like to think that *Episode I: Racer* has had some influence." ✱

» [PC] As well as Podracers, *Galactic Racer* lets you race everything from Landspeeders to Speeder bikes.

STAGES OF EVOLUTION: TERRIFIC TRACKS

UNMISSABLE STAR WARS RACER SERIES COURSES

SUNKEN CITY

A beginner course, but one that has challenges. Zigzagging between the pillars and along the corridors of the track's ornate buildings takes concentration, the walls of its underwater tunnels are all too easily grazed and exiting them into the titular Sunken City is like threading a needle.

GRABVINE GATEWAY

Arguably the most difficult course in *Episode I: Racer*, and certainly the one that needs the most practice to perfect, Grabvine Gateway mainly consists of narrow clearings connected by unforgiving sharp turns. Its diverse environments feature everything from palatial buildings to swampland.

BOONTA EVE CLASSIC

Episode I: Racer and *Racer Arcade* both capture the Classic's speed and environment, but *Racer Revenge* also replicates the close quarters combat from the scene in the film. Just like the other versions, this is as much of an obstacle course as it is a challenge to find the ideal racing line.

SERRES SARRANO

Mostly set in a city that somehow exists inside an only partially dormant volcano, Serres Sarrano funnels Podracers through narrow near dark tunnels that are occasionally lit by pools of lava. The nature of the course means that the constant clashing of metal on metal is an inevitability.

THE MAKING OF ICO

TWENTY-FIVE YEARS ON, WE LOOK BACK AT HOW ICO WENT FROM A CONCEPT FILM ON THE ORIGINAL PLAYSTATION TO A MINIMALIST PS2 MASTERPIECE. DIRECTOR FUMITO UEDA AND SHUHEI YOSHIDA, WHO WAS INSTRUMENTAL IN CHAMPIONING THE GAME WITHIN SONY, HELP US UNCOVER NEW DETAILS

WORDS BY GRAHAM PEMBREY

© Sony Interactive Entertainment

IN THE KNOW

- **PUBLISHER:** SONY COMPUTER ENTERTAINMENT
- **DEVELOPER:** TEAM ICO
- **PLATFORM:** PLAYSTATION 2
- **RELEASED:** 2001
- **GENRE:** ADVENTURE

» [PlayStation 2] You can see just how much thought and attention went into the architecture of *Ico*'s castle.

HUMBLE BEGINNINGS

HOW THE PLAYSTATION VERSION OF ICO "CONTAINED MORE IDEAS"

Few games have moved players and developers quite like *Ico*. The fact that the creators of modern classics such as *Elden Ring*, *Journey* and *The Last Of Us* have name-checked the game as a major influence speaks volumes on that front. Still, since this is **Retro Gamer**, we're just as curious about the classics that preceded *Ico* as we are about those that came after. So, we pose to the game's director Fumito Ueda, were there any particular retro games on his mind while he first sketched out concepts for his PlayStation 2 debut? "In terms of specific games, I think I was influenced by cinematic platformers such as *Another World* and *Prince Of Persia*, which incorporated realistic character animation," he replies. "For their time, these games gave a remarkable sense of realism to character movement and presentation. Rather than functioning as abstract game pieces, the characters felt like real people existing within the world on the screen, and that was something that strongly resonated with me."

DEVELOPER HIGHLIGHTS

SHADOW OF THE COLOSSUS (PICTURED)
PLATFORM: PLAYSTATION 2
RELEASED: 2005

THE LAST GUARDIAN
PLATFORM: PLAYSTATION 4
RELEASED: 2016

GENATLAS
PLATFORM: PC, PS5, XBOX SERIES S/X
RELEASED: TBC

> "I WAS INFLUENCED BY CINEMATIC PLATFORMERS SUCH AS ANOTHER WORLD AND PRINCE OF PERSIA"
> FUMITO UEDA

It's an answer that reflects the formative years Ueda spent playing games and learning to animate on his Commodore Amiga. Just like those impressive titles he mentions, with their incredibly life-like, rotoscoped animation, he explains that, "With *Ico*, it was also very important that the characters did not feel like mere game pieces, but rather like living beings who truly existed in that world." Interestingly, some more obscure inspirations were also at play. "I was also interested in games such as *Ganbare Morikawa-kun 2 Gou* [released in the West as *Pet In TV*], which offered the experience of interacting with AI-driven characters," Ueda adds. Looking back on all of these influences combined, he reflects that, "Instead of the player controlling everything directly, these games explored the idea of forming a relationship with characters that behaved autonomously. Yorda in *Ico* is not a character who always does exactly what the player wants; instead, the player builds a relationship with her by looking after her, calling to her, and taking her by the hand. In that sense, I think my interest at the time in those kinds of experiences also influenced the conception of *Ico*."

That conception happened while Ueda started working as part of the cinematics team at Sony Computer Entertainment Japan in 1997. ▶

SHUHEI YOSHIDA

■ Shuhei Yoshida is CEO of indie game consultancy Yosp Inc and former president of Sony Interactive Entertainment Worldwide Studios.

FUMITO UEDA

■ Fumito Ueda is the director of *Ico*, *Shadow Of The Colossus* and *The Lost Guardian*, and the founder of videogame studio genDESIGN.

» [PlayStation 2] While some sections of the castle are confined, others open up into glorious vistas.

■ Work on *Ico* was suddenly transferred from the PlayStation to the PlayStation 2 part way through development. Surprisingly, Ueda reveals that, "In terms of gameplay elements, I actually think the original PlayStation version contained more ideas. Whether all of those ideas could ultimately have been realised is another matter," he adds. "But the initial concept included more event-driven sequences than the final PlayStation 2 version."

One example he gives is an abandoned scene where Ico was chained up and imprisoned, while mine-carts ran past him through the castle. "The player would use one of them to break the chains and escape," he explains. "Compared to those early concepts, the final PlayStation 2 version became much simpler in its overall structure.

Ueda looks back on the move to the PlayStation 2 as a natural part of working within Sony at the time. "It wasn't simply because those ideas were technically impossible on the original PlayStation," he says. "At the time, we were developing the game as part of Sony Computer Entertainment's internal studio system, and there was a broader company-wide transition toward developing for the next-generation PlayStation 2. Of course, moving to the PlayStation 2 also brought significant advantages in terms of graphics, lighting, and the overall sense of space."

Credit to Evan Amos

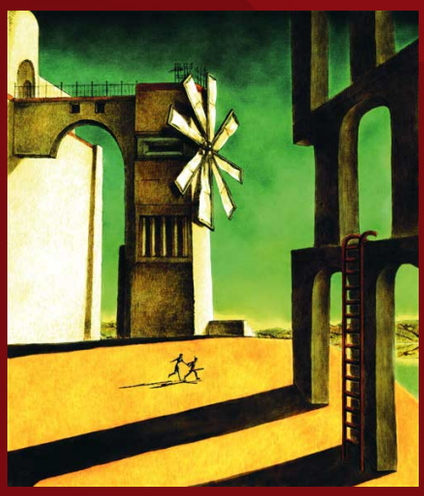
REGIONAL DIFFERENCES

HOW THE NORTH AMERICAN, JAPANESE AND EUROPEAN RELEASES COMPARED

Ico had a notably staggered international release, starting in North America in September 2001 and then reaching Japan in December. European players had to wait a whole six months longer than their North American counterparts and finally got the game in March 2002. Still, good things come to those who wait, and it turned out the Japanese and European versions of *Ico* surpassed the North American edition.

Changes made for Japan and Europe included adjustments to the castle layout, improved AI for Yorda, more balanced combat, different camera angles for certain scenes and some refined puzzles. Additionally, these versions include a range of bonuses on your second play through, including a two-player mode and Yorda's speech being translated, rather than being depicted by cryptic symbols like in the base game.

Another regional difference was the unpopular computer-generated North American cover art. "I was not a fan of the package art that SCEA created, and I was very happy that SCEE kept the original cover art from the team in Japan. The US cover was shockingly bad," comments Yoshida, reflecting the general consensus you'll find online. The much more fondly regarded cover art for the European and Japanese releases was painted by Ueda himself.



Ueda painted the favoured cover art used in Europe and Japan.

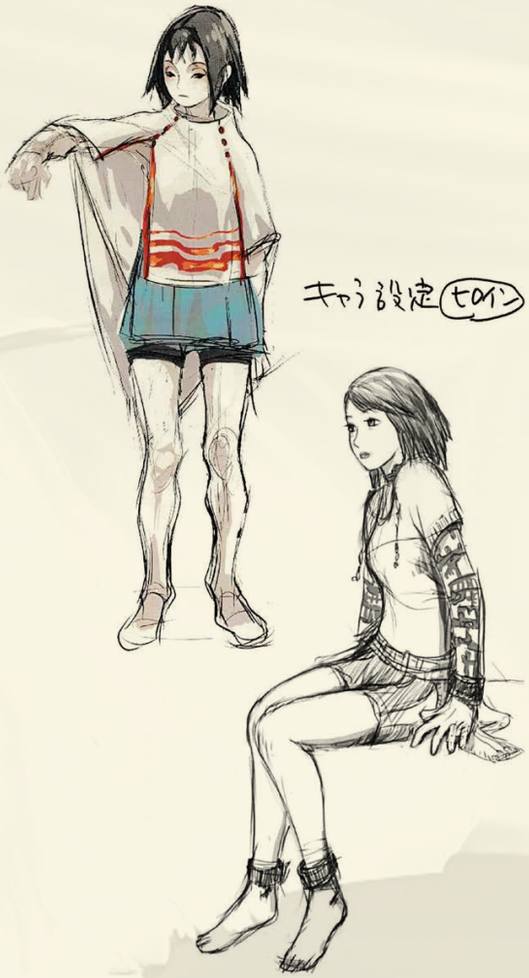
Management at the company clearly sensed his potential early on, as they allowed him the time to work on creating a pilot movie for a personal project he was keen to pursue. "The first image that came to mind was a young boy and a girl who is taller than him," Ueda remembers. "The relationship came first: a boy leading the girl by the hand. She was not simply someone to be protected. She was taller than the boy, somewhat mysterious, and in some ways just beyond the player's reach. I think that balance between the two characters was very important to me." The sights and sounds of Japanese television were another notable reference point. In particular, Ueda highlights that, "I remember thinking about the relationship between Tetsuro and Maetel in [manga, TV series and film] *Galaxy Express 999*, as well as certain television commercials I had seen. There was something compelling about the image of a small boy travelling together with an older, enigmatic woman. From there, I translated that image into gameplay through interactions such as calling to her, holding her hand and leading her forward."

> "I DECIDED TO MOVE THE PROJECT TO PLAYSTATION 2, AS THE NEW HARDWARE CAPABILITY WOULD BE ABLE TO ACHIEVE THE GAME AS UEDA-SAN ENVISIONED"
> SHUHEI YOSHIDA

One of the first people to whom Ueda showed this fledgling proposal was Sony veteran Shuhei Yoshida. Years later, Yoshida would rise to become the long-standing president of Sony Interactive Entertainment Worldwide Studios from 2008 until 2019. He then headed up PlayStation Indies until 2025, at which time he retired from the company and started indie game consultancy Yosp Inc. At the tail end of the Nineties, however, when *Ico* was being conceived, he was still working as a game producer and a senior product development manager for the company. Yoshida recalls of Ueda, "He presented a short concept video of *Ico* that he created by himself for the last three months or so since joining our cinematic team. I thought the concept movie, which showed a boy taking the hand of a girl to run away from a castle, looked moody and interesting. I decided to create a team around Ueda-san to develop the game."

This passionate endorsement from Yoshida proved pivotal. It gave Ueda, who had not long joined Sony as an animator and computer graphics specialist, the chance to shine as a game director. "I hired people to join his team," Yoshida explains of the foundations of what would become known as Team Ico. "I forget how many we were able to hire; maybe around 20 people," Yoshida continues. "The game made good progress, and we were able to present it to the US and the European Sony Computer Entertainment executives with a very positive response, but the team struggled to get the performance up. The game only ran at around 15fps or so." The solution to this, says Yoshida, was to move the development of the game from the original PlayStation over to some brand-new hardware. "In the end, I decided to move the project to PlayStation 2, as the new hardware capability would be able to achieve the game as Ueda-san envisioned. Also, I think I replaced the lead programmer to our new hire, [Jinji] Horagai-san, who eventually became a good partner for Ueda-san at genDESIGN."

» [PlayStation 2] Mobs of shadow creatures pursue Yorda with frightening intensity. Fending them off can be challenging.



» [PlayStation 2] Puzzles are an important part of *Ico*'s design and become increasingly intricate.

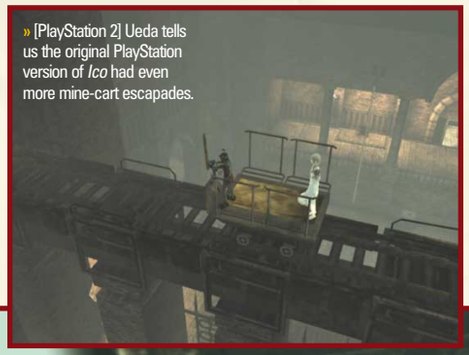
» [PlayStation 2] Ueda wanted saving to feel natural, so worked in these stone benches as checkpoints.

» [PlayStation 2] Ico has three encounters with the queen, who's hellbent on keeping her daughter captive.

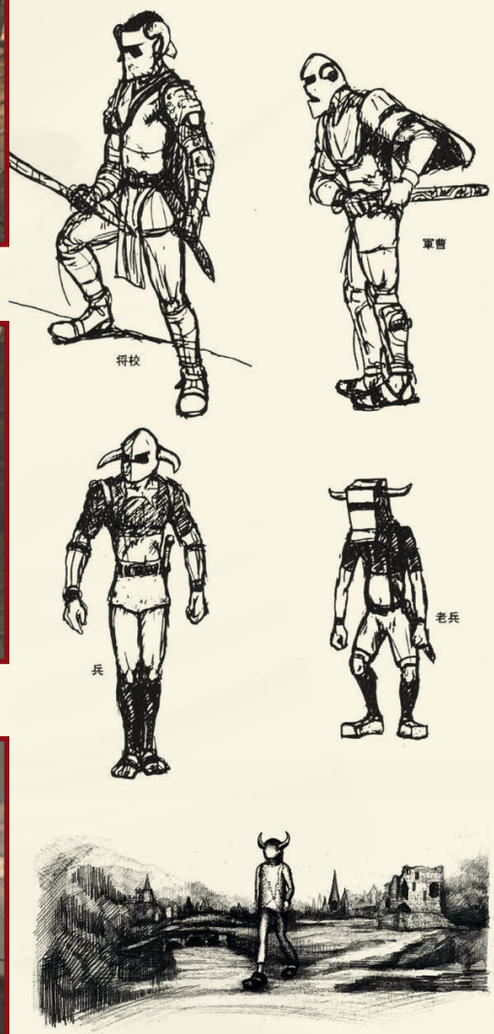
Remarkably, rather than using those shiny new hardware capabilities to make the game more elaborate and crammed with features, Ueda and his team exercised restraint. Through a process of decluttering anything that felt redundant – be it background scenery, puzzles or enemies – the team removed what they could to apply a minimalist, less-is-more game design philosophy. "The idea of 'design by subtraction' was partly intentional from the beginning, and partly the result of practical necessity," reflects Ueda. "Considering the size of our team, the resources we had available, and my own experience and skill level at the time, it simply wasn't realistic to include a large number of gameplay elements and polish all of them to a high standard. Instead of trying to do everything, we chose to focus on a smaller number of elements and devote more attention to the quality and density of each one." Ueda is quick to add, however, that, "This approach wasn't driven solely by constraints, it also reflected my personal taste. I've always been more drawn to works that are simple yet profound than to those that are packed with many complex elements. With *Ico*, by limiting the experience to a small number of core elements – the boy, the girl, the castle, the shadows and the act of holding hands – I ▶

» [PlayStation 2] Progress involves reaching new areas, while working out how to get Yorda there too.

» [PlayStation 2] If Yorda is pulled into a hole by shadow creatures and you don't rescue her in time, it's game over.



» [PlayStation 2] Ueda tells us the original PlayStation version of *Ico* had even more mine-cart escapades.



▶ think the player's attention naturally became focussed on the relationship between the two characters and the atmosphere of the world itself. In the end, by reducing what the player could do, we actually created more space for the player to feel, interpret, and imagine. In that sense, I think the philosophy of subtraction worked very well."

As you move through the castle on your quest to free your companion Yorda, the puzzles and fights with shadowy creatures are punctuated by a memorable save system. Stone benches scattered throughout the ruins act as moments of rest and a chance to record your progress. Ueda is glad to reflect on the design thinking that went into this aspect of the game. "I think the decision to make the stone benches serve as save points came from a desire to pursue a greater sense of realism," he explains. "I always felt a slight sense of discomfort with the conventional, symbolic save points found in many games. They are necessary as a gameplay mechanic, but when a purely functional icon or device suddenly appears in the middle of the world, it can break the sense of immersion. So I wanted to see if the act of saving could be integrated into the world in a way that felt as natural as possible." Ueda also points out that there was a practical gameplay reason for the system. "Ico and Yorda are sometimes separated. If the game were saved while they were in different locations, it could

» [PlayStation 2] At times you'll need to coax Yorda to follow you in taking leaps of faith.

» [PlayStation 2] Yorda went through various design iterations before the team settled on her ghostly appearance.

» [PlayStation 2] Camera angles shift to make the most of the scenery as you traverse the castle.

REMASTERING ICO

HOW A BLUEPOINT GAMES UPDATE IMPROVED THE EXPERIENCE

In February this year, Sony announced the closure of Bluepoint Games, the Texas-based studio renowned for its remarkable craftsmanship in reconstructing classic titles. It was a sad moment for fans of *Ico*, who were quick to call out the studio's involvement in the 2011 remaster of *Ico* as an example of why its work would be missed.

The remaster was part of *The Ico And Shadow Of The Colossus Collection*, which delivered high-definition updates of both games. The changes extended to visual and performance enhancements, rather than adjusting anything about the core game design, and as such you'll find the essential gameplay and story unchanged. What you'll certainly find different are the increased framerate, high-definition graphics and widescreen support. The game also gives greater depth to the graphics using stereoscopic 3D, which is particularly noticeable in the deeper long-distance views, as well as adding surround sound.

Bluepoint Games later worked on a full redesign of *Shadow Of The Colossus*, and Ueda hinted in an interview with IGN earlier this year that he might have hoped to do the same for *Ico* some day. While that sadly won't be possible with Bluepoint now, the PS3 version remains a great way to revisit *Ico* and its follow-up.

easily create inconsistencies or complications when the player resumed the game. We therefore needed a natural way to bring the two characters back together before saving."

With such unique flourishes marking the game out as different from the norm, we wonder whether there were any concerns about the commercial viability of a product like *Ico*. It felt like a complete breath of fresh air on its 2001 release, with an original premise and an otherworldly art style. However, were Sony worried about putting such a bold idea out there at a time when most best-selling games were following more predictable paths? Yoshida says there were no such worries. "I was very excited for the concept, which was both new and interesting, and we were able to get positive support from both Sony Computer Entertainment America and Sony Computer Entertainment Europe, so there was no need for convincing the company management," he stresses. Ueda has very similar recollections. "I didn't have many concerns," he comments on the business considerations around making the game. "At the time, I believed that doing something different from other games was more important than following established conventions. I think that attitude was especially strong within Sony Computer Entertainment. Of course, we weren't completely indifferent to the market, but there was a shared belief that creating something unique was more valuable than making something similar to what already existed. It was also somewhat fortunate that, around that time, interest in fantasy settings was growing, partly due to the popularity of works such as *Harry Potter*. *Ico* is quite different from conventional fantasy, but with its castle, young boy, mysterious girl and enigmatic world, I never felt that it was completely out of step with what audiences were interested in."

> "THERE WAS A SHARED BELIEF THAT CREATING SOMETHING UNIQUE WAS MORE VALUABLE THAN MAKING SOMETHING SIMILAR TO WHAT ALREADY EXISTED"
> FUMITO UEDA

Unexpectedly, as *Ico* was still in development, Yoshida moved to the US to become vice president of product development at Sony Computer Entertainment America, marking the point at which his formal involvement in executive-producing *Ico* ended. However, he recalls that, "I got periodic updates from the new producer and my friend, Kobayashi-san." Looking back on what made the game so special, Yoshida calls out the music of the game as one of the aspects worth a special mention. "I loved the ending song, *You Were There*. The melody was beautiful and the boy soprano was brilliant," he comments. That track and the haunting guitar opener *Castle In The Mist* were both composed by Michiru Oshima, a renowned film and game composer who, alongside sound design duo Pentagon, is responsible for the game's evocative soundtrack. Like Yoshida, Ueda speaks fondly of the game's audio elements, including the dreamlike ambience of the track *Heal* that plays as you sit on a save bench. "Looking back, I think it perfectly complemented the quiet, restful atmosphere of the bench scenes," he reflects.

Another element of *Ico* worth highlighting is how it pre-empted the New Game Plus ▶

BEYOND ICO

THE PATH THAT LED TO UPCOMING RELEASE GENATLAS

International sales of *Ico* were solid enough that Sony green-lit Ueda to work on a successor, which would eventually become *Shadow Of The Colossus* – a separate story from *Ico*, but in many ways a continuation of its spirit, and another PlayStation 2 game that is held in high esteem by players more than two decades on. It's the same kind of kudos that was given to *The Last Guardian*, in which Ueda and his team brought an *Ico*-like experience to the PlayStation 4, revolving around a boy's partnership with a giant feathered creature named Trico.

At the time of writing, Ueda and his studio are finishing work on genATLAS, which looks to continue building on the base laid by Ico a quarter-of-a-century ago.

What would 2001-era Ueda have thought, if he'd had a glimpse of the new project? "I think my first reaction would simply have been, 'That looks interesting!'" Ueda responds. "I'm sure I would have been amazed by the advances in technology, but more than that, I think I would have responded to the feeling of encountering a world and beings unlike anything I had seen before."

You can find out more about *genATLAS* on the genDESIGN website (gendesign.co.jp/en).

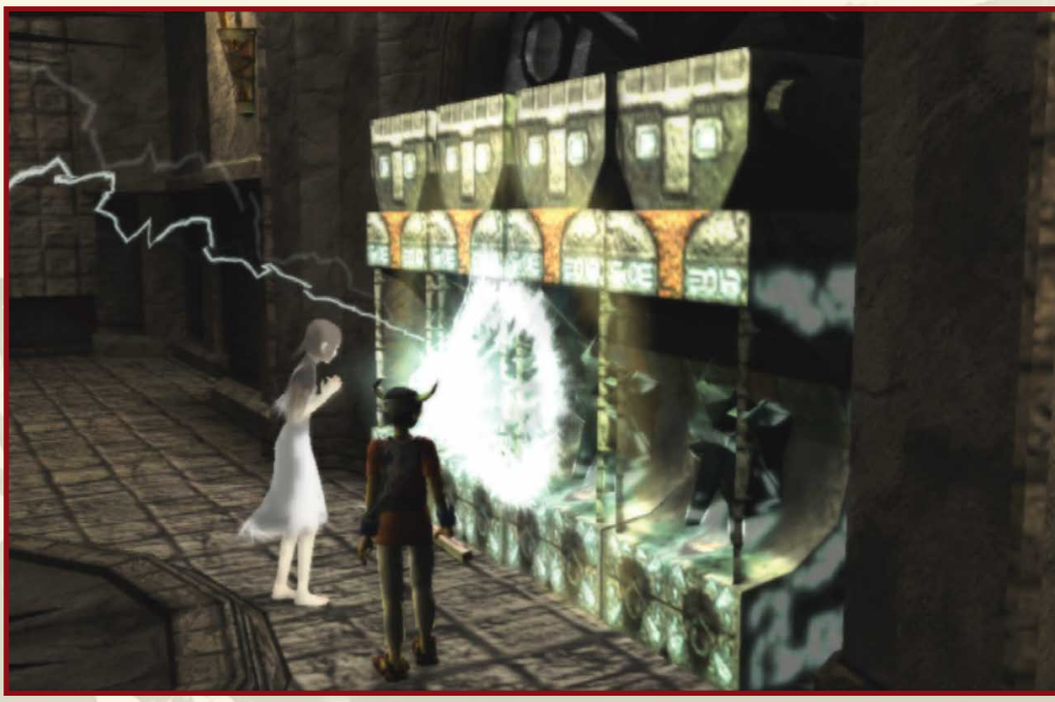
convention of modern releases. Players of the European and Japanese versions of the game, which arrived months after the North American edition and had improvements worked in, were treated to several bonus features on playing through the game for a second time. These included an optional grainy cinematic filter, a bonus ending cutscene, and a multiplayer option allowing a second player to control Yorda. We're curious about whether this multiplayer mode was ever considered for inclusion as a feature in the core game. "I don't think it was something we had planned as part of the game's design from the beginning," Ueda replies. "If I remember correctly, the ability to control Yorda was originally implemented as a debugging feature to make development more efficient. My memory may not be completely accurate on this point, but at the very least, *Ico* was never conceived as a cooperative two-player game from the outset. In the main game, it was important that Yorda was not a character the player could control directly. She needed to behave autonomously, because the relationship between the player and Yorda emerges through calling to her, taking her by the hand and looking after her."

Ueda suggests that the motivation behind including a multiplayer mode and other New Game Plus features was more related to ensuring dedicated players had enough content to keep them busy. "*Ico* is not a particularly long game," he points out. "We wanted to add a little more replay value after players had finished it. So I believe we decided to repurpose this debugging feature and include it as a reward for completing the game."

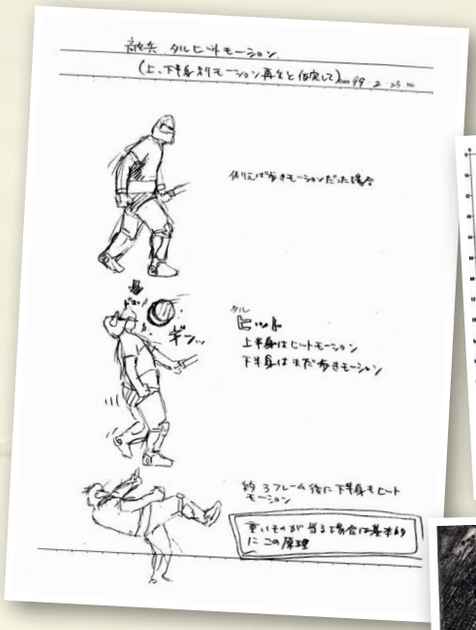
> "ICO IS NOT A PARTICULARLY LONG GAME. WE WANTED TO ADD A LITTLE MORE REPLAY VALUE"
> FUMITO UEDA

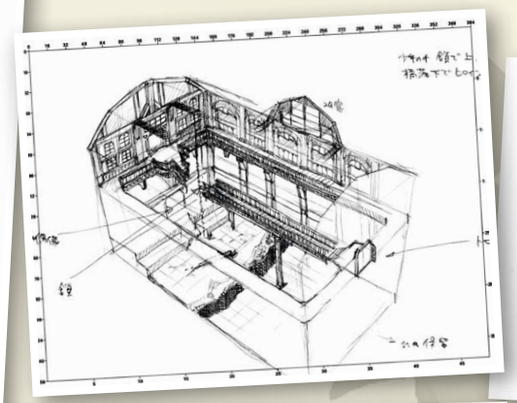
When it was released in 2001 after four years in development, *Ico* proved to be a critical success. *Official UK PlayStation Magazine* described it as "spellbinding" and "a game to savour". Meanwhile, Eurogamer argued in a 10/10 review that, "In an industry justly accused of leaning towards style over content, *Ico* is a beacon of light and a bastion of superb game design." Although IGN found the game's relatively short length to be a slight downside, it concluded that, "The feeling of simply being in the world that *Ico* creates is one of the most fascinating things I've ever seen in a videogame. The visuals, sound, and original puzzle design come together to make something that is almost, if not quite, completely unlike anything else on the market, and feels wonderful because of it." Several awards followed, including for achievements in art direction and level design, and in the years after launch the game would continue to gather public praise, including from *Dark Souls* creator Hidetaka Miyazaki, who credited *Ico* with his decision to start working as a game designer.

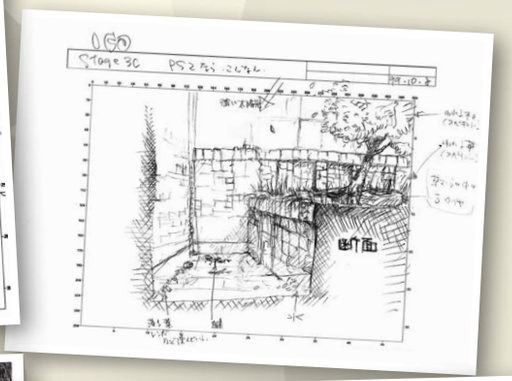
Ultimately, *Ico* laid a foundation that Ueda and his team would build on with their subsequent, more commercially successful works, from the stark open world of *Shadow Of The Colossus* to the moving storytelling of *The*



» [PlayStation 2] Sections of the castle are separated by columns only Yorda has the power to part.

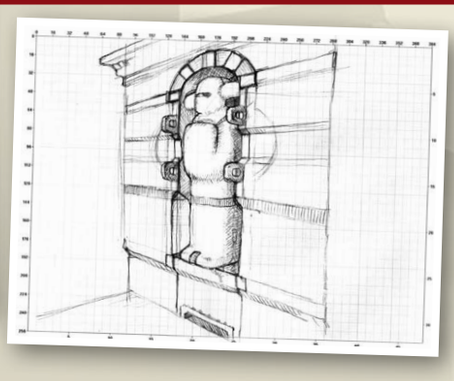






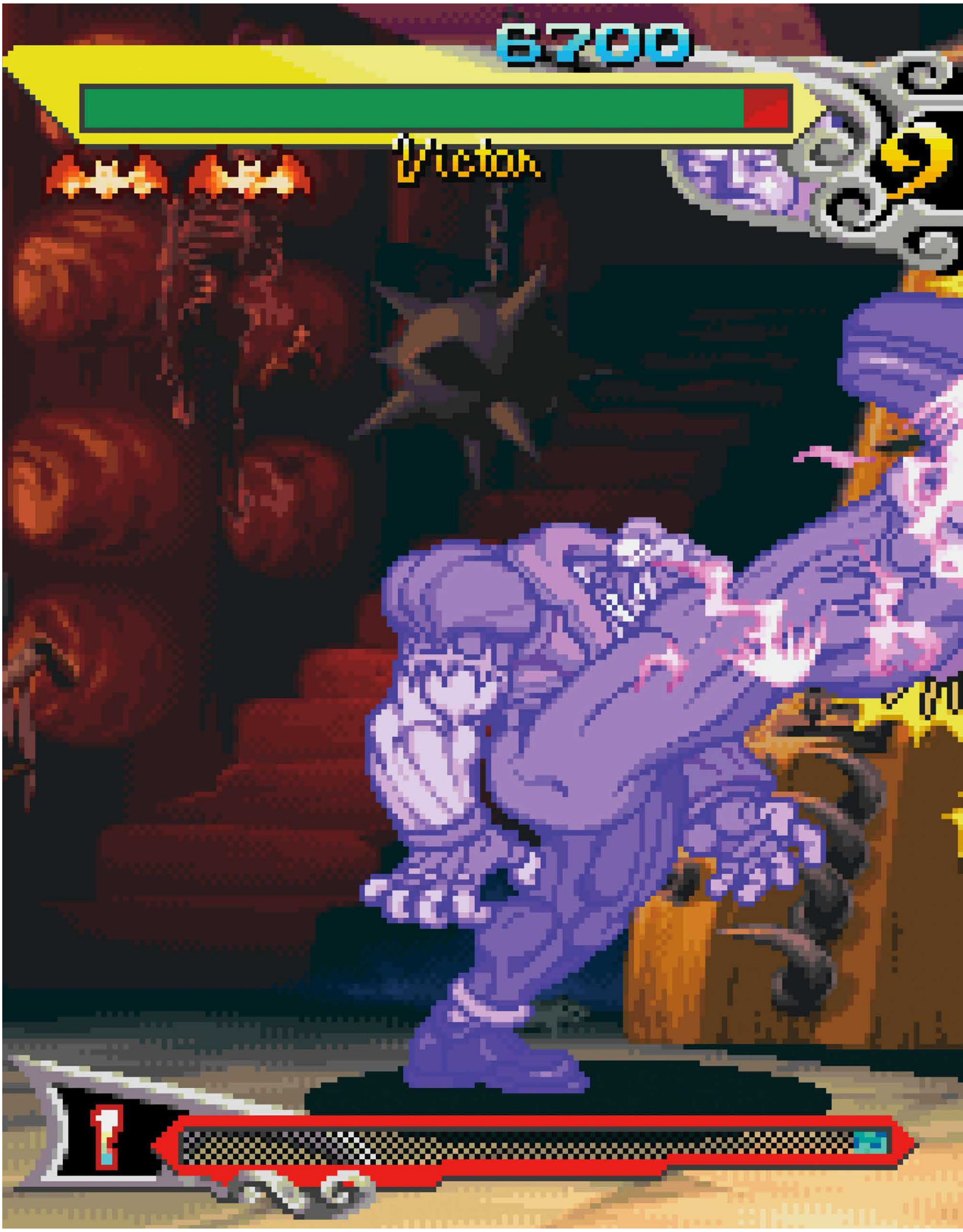
» [PlayStation 2] There's a real verticality to the level design as the adventure unfolds.

» [PlayStation 2] This chandelier (part of an early puzzle) was made more obvious in the Japanese and European releases.



Last Guardian. While completing the long development of the latter game, which began on PlayStation 3 but was finally delivered on the PlayStation 4, Ueda and members of Team Ico formed the independent studio genDESIGN. The company announced a new game provisionally known as *Project: Robot* at the 2024 Game Awards. After a period of silence, two years later at the 2026 Summer Game Fest, a trailer revealed the full title of *genATLAS*, with the footage showing a lone figure operating an enormous mechanical being in an atmospheric sci-fi landscape. While many details about the new game are yet to be revealed, the footage available so far suggests the less-is-more approach taken while making *Ico* is alive and well.

"When I make games, I always try to imagine how I would feel if I were a player seeing the game for the very first time, without knowing anything about it," Ueda summarises. "Rather than thinking from the developer's perspective or relying on explanations, I try to create something that makes a first-time player wonder, 'What is this?' or, 'I want to touch it,' or 'I want to see how it moves.'" Playing through *Ico* again with fresh senses, a quarter of a century after the game first launched, we find ourselves wandering around the castle with renewed feelings of wonder and curiosity. It remains a work with a quiet simplicity and understated elegance that feel timeless. ✱


6700
Victor

Vampire Savior: The Lord Of Vampire

THE THIRD TIME IS THE (DARK) CHARM

» SATURN » 1998 » CAPCOM

There are two things I always look for in a fighting game: engaging combat mechanics and interesting characters. Luckily, Capcom's third *Darkstalkers* game has both in abundance.

By far the most interesting change to the series is the introduction of the Damage Gauge System. Unlike the earlier games, matches aren't split into best of three rounds. Instead you're simply given two life bars and you lose when they're both depleted. Additionally, any white damage you receive in a fight can be recovered if you don't take any further hits. It's a great inclusion, as it means there's some lovely ebb and flow to each battle. Another nice touch is that when a player is down the other gets to keep whatever remaining energy they still have, meaning skilled players can actually win a match without losing a single slither of life. (I am not a skilled player.)

The Dark Force System is another significant change to the game and it's one that is unique to each character. Once activated you'll be able to pull off all sorts of crazy tricks. Frankenstein's monster wannabe Victor has access to powerful, electrified attacks, Jedah and Q-Bee can freely fly around the stage until their timer runs down, while Felicia and Demitri summon helpers who cause additional damage. The Dark Force System not only massively freshens up the series, but also helps differentiate the combatants from each other, which, let's be honest, are already highly diverse in the first place.

In most fighting games I soon find a couple of characters and stick to them exclusively but I've never really done that with *Vampire Savior* as each of the weird and wonderful protagonists are too interesting to ignore. It does mean that I've never reached any sort of overall proficiency with any of them in the game like I have with the likes of Hugo in *Street Fighter III: 3rd Strike*, but it also means that I've had a hell of a lot of fun. ✱

ULTIMATE GUIDE

METAL GEAR SOLID 4

GUNS OF THE PATRIOTS

TACTICAL ESPIONAGE ACTION

RELEASED AFTER A SHAKY FIRST YEAR FOR THE PLAYSTATION 3, METAL GEAR SOLID 4 DEMONSTRATED THE POWER OF SONY'S HARDWARE WHILE BAFFLING ANYONE WHO WASN'T ALREADY A HARDCORE FAN OF THE SERIES. HERE'S OUR GUIDE TO ONE OF THE MOST LAVISHLY MADE SEQUELS OF ALL TIME...

WORDS BY SAMUEL ROBERTS

SNAKE CHARMER

KONAMI'S RECENT MGS4 RERELEASE COMPILATION IS THE REAL DEAL

■ A resurgent Konami recently rereleased *MGS4* on the second *MGS: Master Collection* volume for modern formats, along with PSP favourite *Peace Walker*. This presents the game at a far sharper 4K resolution with up to 60fps performance, depending on the capabilities of the hardware. The controls have also been updated from the PS3 version so firing is mapped to the triggers, making it feel similar to more recent third-person games.

The biggest victim of the visual bump are some of the flat environmental textures, but generally it's a very welcome upgrade. References to the PS3 in the original game have cleverly been swapped out with new voice recordings from Otacon actor Christopher Randolph, which demonstrates real consideration and care on the publisher's part.

But the real treat in *Metal Gear Solid: Master Collection Vol 2* is the first ever official rerelease of Game Boy Color classic *Ghost Babel*, which has a similar top-down style to the original MSX games. Its graphics are a better fit for the Switch 2's handheld screen than your giant 4K TV.

***Metal Gear Solid 4: Guns Of The Patriots* was the perfect match for the PlayStation 3.** It was an ostentatious game for an overly glossy £425 console that had a slew of back-of-the-box features few ever used (printer support, anyone?). It was fan service at its most decadent, unconcerned with anyone but the most devoted fans who fell in love with *Metal Gear Solid* back in 1998 and absorbed every detail of its two subsequent sequels. If you were a new player, you were completely lost – but this was the game made to sell PS3s.

Kojima Productions pulled out all the stops: multiple live-action intro videos, gorgeously choreographed (and outrageously long) in-game cutscenes, a cavalcade of returning characters and five entirely different locations, including a return to the island of Shadow Moses from *Metal Gear Solid*.

> "IT'S ALMOST LIKE A 'CAREFUL WHAT YOU WISH FOR' WARNING FROM HIDEO KOJIMA ABOUT PANDERING TO THE MOST VOCAL PARTS OF YOUR AUDIENCE"

With the benefit of hindsight, though, *MGS4*'s self-indulgence seems quaint. The game was made in under four years and it's less than 20 hours long – this is restrained by today's blockbuster standards in both respects. Yet *Metal Gear Solid* 4 felt slightly out of time even in 2008, summed up by its colossal eight hours of cutscenes that proved one of its biggest talking points.

While *MGS4* is fundamentally still a stealth game, that descriptor gets murkier as the game progresses. Crucially, the game's 3D camera and over-the-shoulder aiming represented an upgrade on *Snake Eater*'s *Subsistence* edition, borrowing from the technically excellent gunplay of *Gears Of War*.

Players once again take on the role of legendary soldier Solid Snake, now visibly aging much faster than he appeared in *MGS2*, the last canonical sequel. Just as Hideo Kojima wouldn't let you play as the Solid Snake you remembered for more than an hour in *Sons Of Liberty*, here he's only willing to give you a compromised version of Snake who's dealing with back pain.

Starting in the warzone of an unnamed Middle-Eastern country, players are plunged into an endless war where private military companies are battling to spin profits. This includes factions operated by series villain Liquid Snake and the Illuminati-style Patriots he seeks to destroy.

This gave *MGS4* a great marketing hook: this is a stealth game set in a live battlefield. Well, it is for two electrifying chapters, anyway. The Middle-East section throws Old Snake into battles he can either avoid or engage with, and helping the local militia beat Liquid's forces is addictive and refreshingly original. This is expanded upon in the excellent South America-set second chapter, which features raids on enemy bases in a setting that superficially resembles *MGS3*'s jungle.

Then, the game abandons that 'battlefield stealth' design notion and its creators' worst impulses take over. Chapter three's main objective is to follow a member of a ▶

» [PlayStation 5] The final duel between Snake and Liquid Ocelot really delivers, even if it's no *Tekken* when it comes to beat-'em-up mechanics.

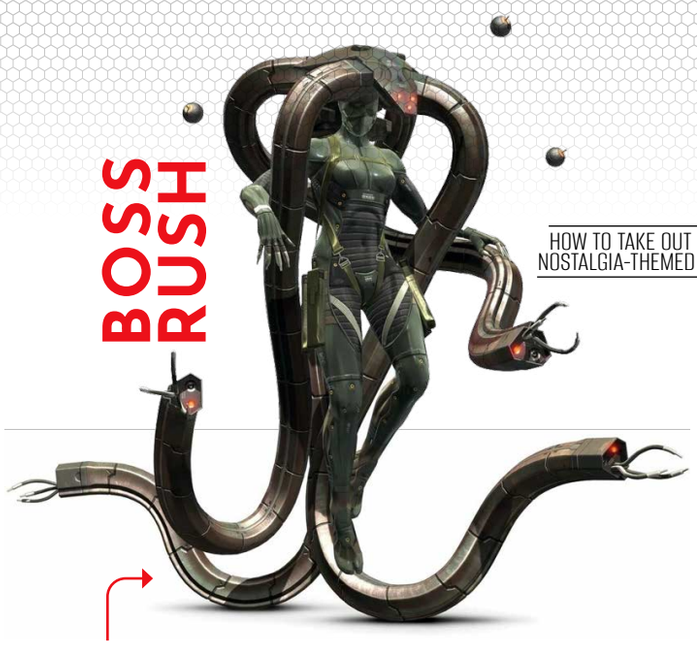
» [PlayStation 5] Crammed with series references to a fault, *MGS4* is a celebration of the games that preceded it.

IN THE KNOW

- **PUBLISHER:** KONAMI
- **DEVELOPER:** KOJIMA PRODUCTIONS
- **PLATFORM:** PLAYSTATION 3
- **RELEASED:** 2008
- **GENRE:** STEALTH

BOSS RUSH

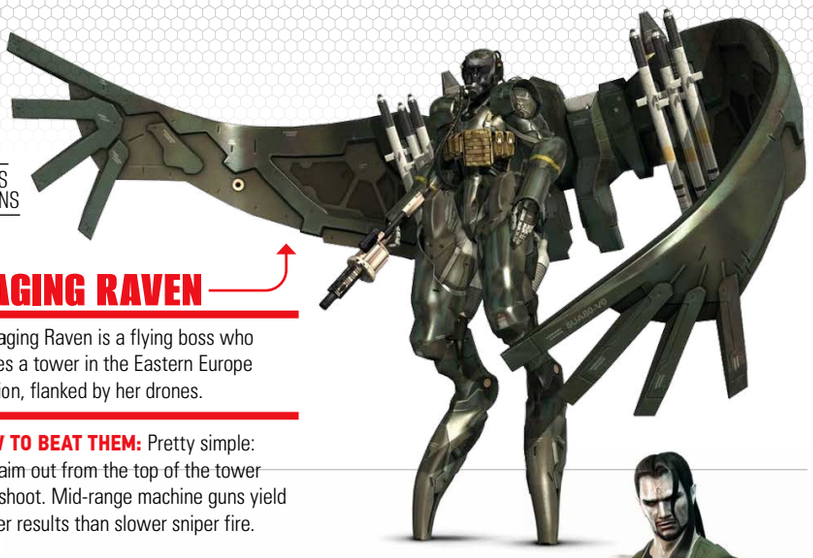
HOW TO TAKE OUT MGS4'S NOSTALGIA-THEMED VILLAINS



RAGING RAVEN

■ Raging Raven is a flying boss who circles a tower in the Eastern Europe section, flanked by her drones.

HOW TO BEAT THEM: Pretty simple: just aim out from the top of the tower and shoot. Mid-range machine guns yield better results than slower sniper fire.



LAUGHING OCTOPUS

■ The first Beauty And The Beast unit uses camo tech to blend into her surroundings and imitate others – including Snake.

HOW TO BEAT THEM: This is a game of hide and seek. Most guns will do the job. Just watch out as she blends into the ceiling, a painting on the wall, or hides in a box.

CRYING WOLF

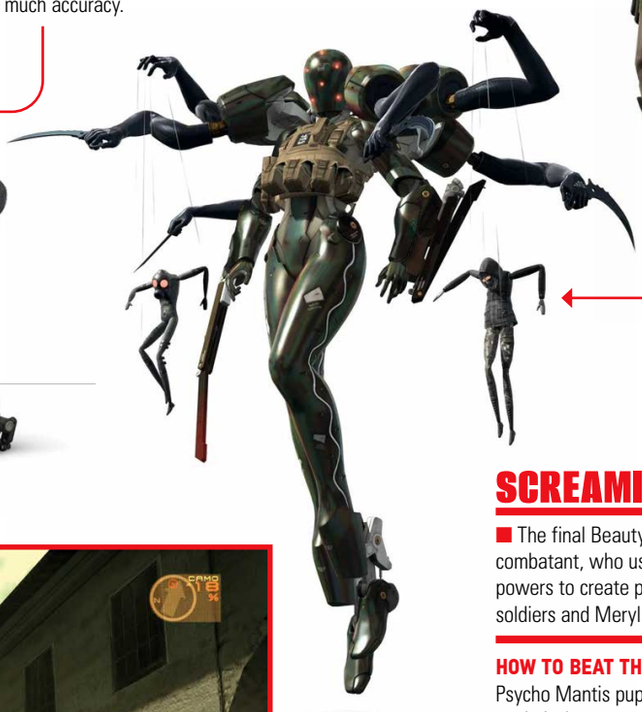
■ This Beauty And The Beast fight takes place in the same location as the Sniper Wolf battle in *MGS1*, obscured by a blizzard.

HOW TO BEAT THEM: The night-vision goggles give away her location – and the rest is easy. The XM25 grenade launcher is your best bet, because it doesn't require much accuracy.

VAMP

■ Campy immortal warrior who likes to jump around the environment. Murdered Otacon's sister in *MGS2*, so there's a score to settle.

HOW TO BEAT THEM: Get him in a CQC hold then inject him with the syringe – this is a solution the game does not adequately explain to you.

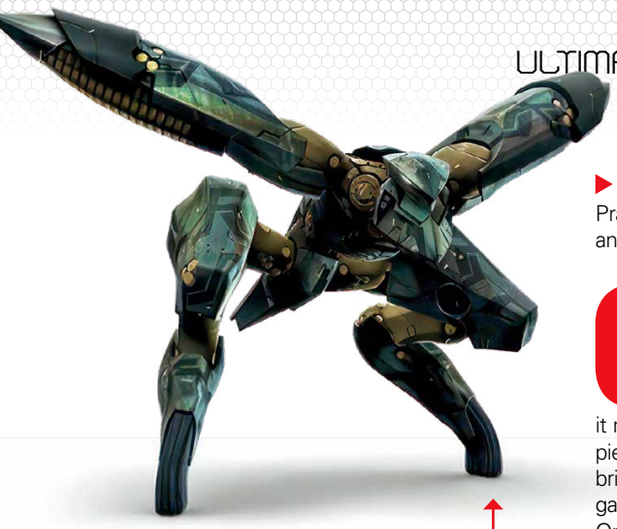


SCREAMING MANTIS

■ The final Beauty And The Beast combatant, who uses Mantis-style psychic powers to create puppets of the dead soldiers and Meryl.

HOW TO BEAT THEM: Simply shoot the Psycho Mantis puppet off of its strings, equip it then torment her with its ghosts for a one-hit kill. Just put Meryl to sleep first.

» [PlayStation 5] The Gekko are the smallest Metal Gears to date, but they make unsettling cow-like moo sounds and can kick Snake to death in two hits.



METAL GEAR RAY

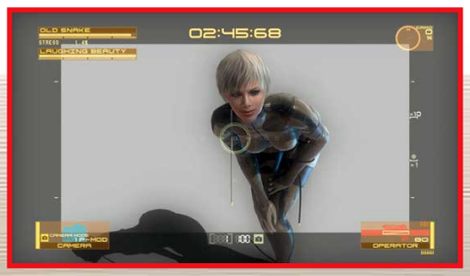
■ It's *MGS1* vs *MGS2* in this visually spectacular battle of the Metal Gears, which takes place in Shadow Moses.

HOW TO BEAT THEM: This is very easy. Blast RAY with rockets and gatling gun fire, then get close enough to hit it with REX's melee attacks.

LIQUID OCELOT

■ The final battle with Liquid – plus Ocelot – on top of the Outer Haven ship, as the two combatants relive their extensive history with one another.

HOW TO BEAT THEM: Dodge plenty and hammer the attack button until you're locked into a QTE sequence. That's when you can do a lot of damage and end the fight quickly.



» [PlayStation 5] Filed under 'you could never get away with that these days', the Beauty And The Beast bosses will pose for a photoshoot if you avoid them for long enough.

resistance movement across a gorgeous Prague-esque city. It's incredibly dull, however, and a poor fit for *MGS4*'s style of gameplay.

Chapter four takes players back to Shadow Moses. While the nostalgia trip is exceptionally well-executed, the corridors are filled with boring robot enemies rather than humans, meaning it might as well be a non-interactive museum piece. The fifth and final chapter gives you one brief bit of regular *MGS* stealth play, then it's a gauntlet of boss battles and lengthy cutscenes. Once the story is over, players are treated to a number of interminable character send-offs, including Meryl marrying her awful comrade Johnny.

Looking back now, it's clear that the goal was to deliver a satisfying end to the *Metal Gear Solid* saga above all else, but the tidal wave of fan service eventually submerges the game's early promise. It's not just that the cutscenes are long: it's how frequently they interrupt the gameplay, resulting in an increasingly fractured experience.

"MGS4 REMAINED ONE OF THE PS3'S BEST SHOWCASES THROUGHOUT THE CONSOLE'S LIFESPAN"

The story gives *MGS* fans too much of what they think they want. In retrospect it almost feels like a 'careful what you wish for' warning from Hideo Kojima about pandering to the most vocal parts of your audience, which brings JJ Abrams' awful final *Star Wars* sequel to mind. Indeed, the *MGS* creator reportedly had to be talked out of a much darker ending for Snake and Otacon by members of his team, and what you get instead is something that feels slightly inauthentic to the more existential finales of *MGS1*, *2* and *3*.

Still, there's no shortage of things to enjoy about *MGS4*'s sheer excess. The step up in visual fidelity over the PS2 entries is extraordinary. It truly does deliver spectacle: even if the cutscenes aren't always welcome, they are expertly choreographed and framed, particularly the two fights between *MGS2*'s Raiden – now a cybernetic ninja – and Vamp.

The battlefields really feel like battlefields, crammed with units gunning each other down and vehicles that raise the stakes. You'll unlock so many weapons in this game that you genuinely won't use them all in a single playthrough. The OctoCamo, which automatically recolours the textures on Snake's sneaking suit to resemble his surroundings, is still a marvel 18 years later. *MGS4* has a bloody in-game iPod. The expensive touches never stop coming.

Even if there isn't a boss battle in here as timeless as The End sniper duel from *MGS3*, the Beauty And The Beast units – mechs operated by psychotic women, each a victim of war – are suitably exciting and varied encounters, even if their outdated elements are self-evident.

The fan service frequently works a treat: there's no doubt that the final hand-to-hand fight with Ocelot delivers, especially when the opening theme to *Snake Eater* kicks in. The

SIBLING RIVALRY

SNAKE AND LIQUID ACROSS THE YEARS

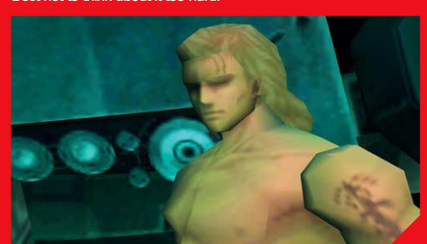
■ Along with *MGS2*'s main villain, Solidus Snake, Solid and Liquid Snake are both clones of antagonist Big Boss. They were each created as part of the Les Enfants Terribles project.

Snake first meets Liquid at Shadow Moses in the original *Metal Gear Solid*, where he eventually bests him in hand-to-hand combat. By the start of *MGS2*, his arm has been attached to subordinate Revolver Ocelot, where he's infamously able to take control of his body from beyond the grave.

Liquid escapes at the close of *MGS2*, vowing to hunt down and destroy the Patriots. By *MGS4*, Liquid completely controls Ocelot's body and has used his power to plunge the world into an endless war. After destroying his AI system and preventing a nuclear launch, Snake finally beats Liquid to death on top of his giant ship, Outer Haven.

Big Boss, meanwhile, never actually met his cloned 'son' Liquid Snake in the events of the series – while players do encounter a young Liquid in *MGSV*, your main character in that game is not actually Big Boss as you're led to believe.

» [PC] Liquid controls Ocelot via his arm. Best not to think about it too hard.



» [PC] Liquid was voiced by actor Cam Clarke in the first *MGS*. It's to *MGS4*'s detriment that they didn't bring him back.

» [PlayStation 5] There's no question that shooting controls and the overall interface got a massive upgrade in *MGS4*, drawing influence from 2006's *Gears Of War*.

» [PlayStation 5] Weapons specialist Drebin offers access to firearms at any time across the game, which feels like an odd system for a stealth game. He also lives with a pet monkey.

> "JUST LIKE THE CONSOLE IT WAS MADE FOR, GUNS OF THE PATRIOTS WAS FLAWED, EXTRAVAGANT AND OVERLY STUFFED WITH FEATURES"

▶ mech battle between Metal Gear REX and RAY in Shadow Moses is similarly thrilling.

Yet even with all the money in the world, *MGS4* is inferior to its three predecessors as an actual game. There's a complete vision of a stealth experience in the earlier *MGS* games – the first elegantly translated *Metal Gear 2: Solid Snake*'s top-down mechanics into 3D, while *MGS2* enhanced the simulation elements with more detailed guard behaviour and first-person aiming. *MGS3* gave you extensive camo and survival systems.

***MGS4*, meanwhile, only dedicates 40% of the game to a proper stealth-oriented experience, which feels like a missed opportunity.** *Guns Of The Patriots* would've benefitted from the kind of enhanced rerelease that *MGS1* and *2* got, chucking in a deluge of VR missions to better use the stealth and combat mechanics created especially for this game. Instead, you only get a little taste of its potential. It's telling that *MGSV* would correct that seven years later by almost entirely eliminating the story as a distraction.

It's funny thinking that this game was a PS3 system seller. It's such an insular proposition compared to something like *Uncharted: Drake's Fortune*, which launched months earlier and required so much less homework to enjoy.

Yet *MGS4* remained one of the PS3's best showcases throughout the console's lifespan. It embraced the Sixaxis motion controls that few players cared about. There's no disc-swapping, as Otacon points out, because the game all fits on one Blu-Ray, which was part of the Sony sales pitch for that generation. The PS3 emulated the original PlayStation version of *MGS* at the start of the Shadow Moses sequence, because that was one of its capabilities.

And obviously, it still looks and sounds great, 18 years hence and now finally available on modern hardware. Yes, it's got the *Black Hawk Down*-style brown colour palette of many games from this time, but the artistry that went into character models, facial animations and environments holds up wonderfully.

MGS4 is a singular experience, as you always expect from a game with Hideo Kojima's name on it. Just like the console it was made for, *Guns Of The Patriots* was flawed, extravagant and overly stuffed with features – yet undeniably a fascinating proposition for what it represented at the end of one era of games and the start of another. ✱

ASSISTANT PRODUCER Q+A

MGS4'S ASSISTANT PRODUCER AND IN-GAME PODCAST HOST RYAN PAYTON ON THE GAME'S GENERATIONAL LEAP

***MGS4* was Kojima Productions' first HD project. How challenging was it for the studio to adapt to making this game versus the PS2 or PSP entries?**
The team certainly felt the weight of being the poster child for the new HD era. On my first day I was shown a work-in-progress cut of *Metal Gear Solid 4*'s Tokyo Game Show 2005 trailer, which was comprised of footage captured from an early PS3 dev kit. The source footage was nowhere near framerate, which required the team to speed it up in post. I remember everyone having a mixture of hope and anxiety as to whether they'd eventually be able to match the fidelity promised in that debut trailer, at an acceptable framerate, by the time the game launched. Looking back, we didn't hit the same fidelity target promised in that trailer, but we still delivered what was the best-looking game on PS3 in 2008.

Which parts of the game did you work on the most in your role?
My boss saw the potential of letting me run loose and just do whatever it took to make the game a success. On a given week I would find myself working on game balance, box art, trailers, organising research trips and voice-over recordings, meeting with our reps at PlayStation, and then, to top it all off, spending the weekend editing our podcast. With Hideo's blessing, I became the most annoying person in the building about *MGS4*'s controls, frequently meeting with the designers and providing feedback.

In interviews at the time, you mentioned that *Gears Of War* had some influence during development. How did that manifest in the finished game?
I think it's safe to say that *Gears Of War* had a profound impact on us. At E3 2006, Hideo and [producer] Ken Imaizumi met Cliff Bleszinski and got hands-on time with the game. I remember we were all impressed with its visuals and controls. Specifically, we liked how they did over-the-shoulder aiming and contextual actions, all done in an accessible fashion. Given the team make-up, it's not surprising that the bulk of Kojima Productions didn't play Western videogames. But I was able to assemble about ten or so of my colleagues, mostly younger developers, who actually owned Xbox 360s and absolutely loved *Gears Of War*. We'd all work a long day at the office and then race home to get a few hours of multiplayer in before calling it.

The cutscenes in *MGS4* are infamously long. What are your thoughts on the game's story in retrospect?
The cinematics are extremely long, no question. Hideo Kojima approached *MGS4* as the final leg of a long race and wanted to empty the tank. The game was intended to be an homage to every previous entry and not let any idea fall to the cutting-room floor. When all was said and done, the length of our cinematics didn't surprise me, but the ratio of gameplay to cinematics certainly did. I remember being nervous heading into launch as I thought the critics and fans would be upset by the relatively short length of the gameplay sequences. Thankfully, across the board, people were absolutely floored by the game.

Was there a buzz at the studio to revisit Shadow Moses within *MGS4*? How do you reflect on your contributions to the game 18 years later?
I remember designers and artists rebuilding Shadow Moses with the original *Metal Gear Solid* running on a monitor beside them. What defines *MGS4* for me is the sheer number of expensive one-offs: the in-game iPod, the live-action frying-egg shots, dedicated teams for the REX versus RAY moment and *Tekken*-inspired Liquid fight. For better or worse, the Shadow Moses chapter had to compete for time and attention with all of that. Looking back at *MGS4*, I'm extremely proud of what we were able to accomplish, and doubt I'll ever be part of a game development endeavour quite like that [again].

THE STEALTH MASTER

HOW TO SNEAK THROUGH GUNS OF THE PATRIOTS

ADAPTIVE CAMOUFLAGE

■ Snake's OctoCamo suit changes texture to match the surrounding environment. It's not an automatic invisibility trick, however – staying out of sight and remaining still are key, as is staying out of the light to send the percentage meter up a few points.

NOT YOUR WAR

■ As Otacon reminds you in the very first chapter, you're aligned with neither side in this war. Simply taking the quiet route around most of the streets in the Middle East will enable you to avoid any conflict entirely, and pays into the sneaking mission thing.

BOX OR BARREL?

■ As well as the classic Snake hiding box, this is the first game where Snake can disguise himself as a barrel on the battlefield. He can even roll around in it for some mobility, at least until he throws up, but that's not the best thing when on the battlefield.

TRANQ REIGNS SUPREME

■ The tranquilliser rifle known as the Mosin-Nagant is pretty loud, but it's brilliant at non-lethally downing enemies at range. This gun is essential at helping the rebels get an edge on Liquid's forces – plus you won't have all those deaths on your conscience.

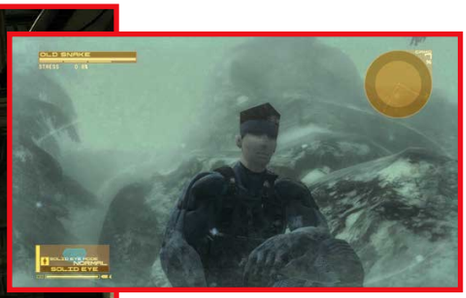
FILTHY MAGAZINES

■ You have a few ways to mess with in-game soldier behaviour in this: leaving *Playboy* magazines around, or playing certain tracks from your iPod. You can also hold unaware enemies at gunpoint as you could in *MGS2* and *3*.

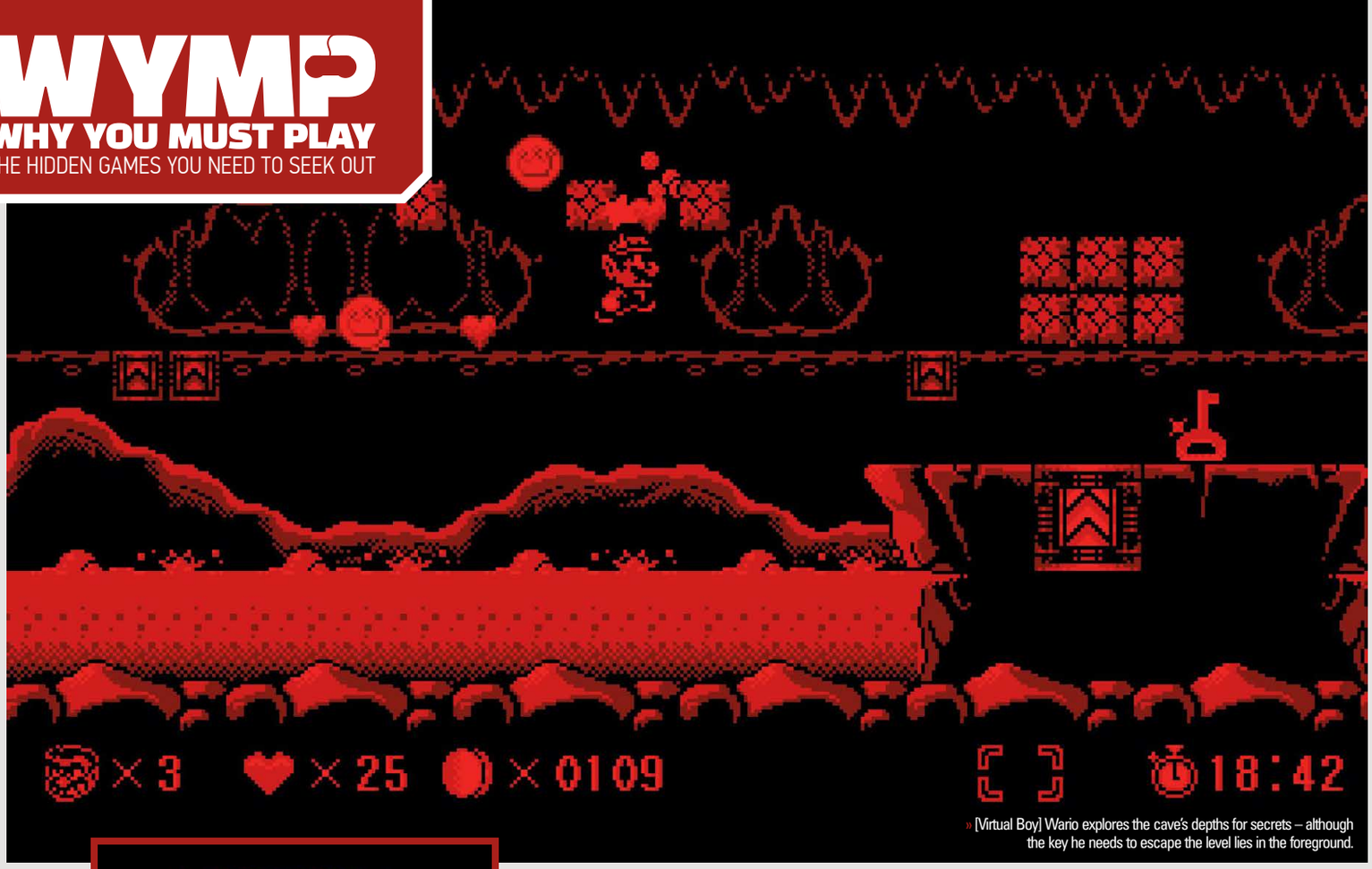
SUPPRESSIVE FIRE

■ *MGS4* has a weapon customisation system, and while it's not that complex, it does give certain guns an advantage. Equipping a suppressor on the mighty P90, for example, stops it from making too much noise in the battlefield, which feels like an unfair advantage.

» [PlayStation 5] Raiden, the subject of much online hate as the lead of *MGS2*, probably has the best character arc – and cutscenes – in the entire game.



» [PlayStation 5] *Guns Of The Patriots* leans heavily into *MGS1* nostalgia, but fills the icy corridors of Shadow Moses with tedious little robots instead of human enemies.



» [Virtual Boy] Wario explores the cave's depths for secrets – although the key he needs to escape the level lies in the foreground.

» [Virtual Boy] The perspective changes during boss fights, as Wario and his adversary exchange volley fire.

We return to shine a light on those overlooked games that we passionately believe you need in your gaming life. In this issue we grab the ergonomically questionable Virtual Boy and revisit a game that's the closest thing to a killer app on Nintendo's unloved system

Martyn Carroll

VIRTUAL BOY WARIO LAND

» **PUBLISHER:** NINTENDO » **DEVELOPER:** NINTENDO R&D1 » **PLATFORM:** VIRTUAL BOY » **RELEASED:** 1995

THE GAME

Having debuted as the boisterous final boss in the second *Super Mario Land* game in 1992, and made his playable debut in the third in 1994, Wario returned the following year in an exclusive title for the Virtual Boy. The game is another 'physical' platformer, where Wario doesn't gracefully glide through levels like Mario – he smashes them to pieces by barging, stomping and slamming everything (and everyone) in his way. As in his previous Game Boy outing, he's aided by special headwear that unlocks new abilities, allowing him to become stronger, fly and shoot flames. And this time around, you can combine all three to become King Dragon, Wario's final form.

The overall aim of the game is to escape from a series of gloomy caves while gathering as much treasure as possible. There are ten standard stages plus four boss battles and a couple of bonus minigames where you can earn extra hearts and coins. There's a key on each standard stage that unlocks the door to the next, plus a special treasure to find. If you collect all ten treasures you'll unlock the good ending – and if you manage to do it all in under two hours, you'll see the best ending.

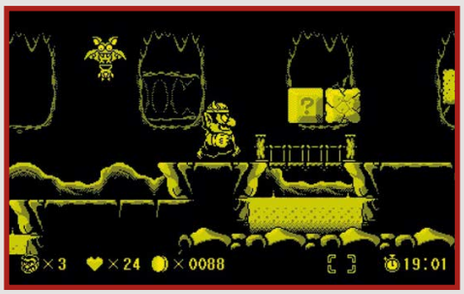
WHAT MAKES IT SPECIAL

As you'd expect from a Nintendo game set in the *Mario* universe, there are no half measures here. It's a clever and amusing platformer, foremost, that will have you smiling and nodding sagely as you play. But it's also the perfect game for the Virtual Boy hardware. Many 3D effects are employed throughout, from subtle parallax scrolling to give the impression of depth to items firing towards your peepers. The standout visual trick occurs when you find a pad or pipe that transports Wario to the background of stages, where the wee menace continues looting in the distance.

While the game does show off the Virtual Boy's stereoscopic capabilities, it's also designed to minimise the issues the plagued the device, namely eyestrain with a side order of migraine. Each stage is nice and short, so you can give your head a rest at regular intervals, and there are plenty of darker scenes that are easier on the eyes.

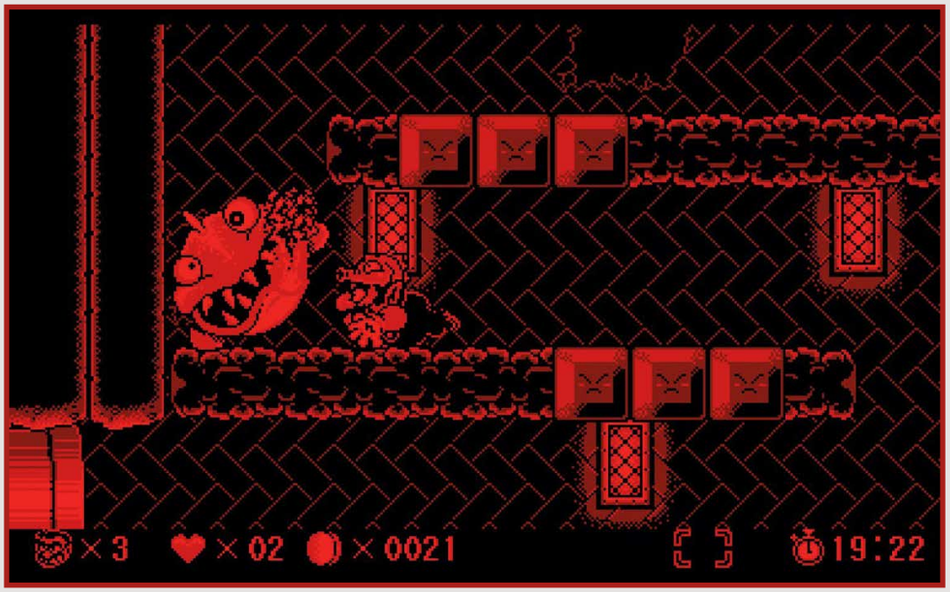
THE RECEPTION

The game reviewed extremely well on release. US mag *Nintendo Power* awarded it an average score of 4.2 out of 5, writing, "*Wario Land* not only shows off all that the Virtual Boy system can be, it rocks. This is a fully realised game with some great 3D elements." In the UK, *N64*



» [Virtual Boy] Yes! On the new Switch implementation, you can swap out the dreary red for a different colour.

» Virtual Boy on a budget. If you have the old Labo VR Kit for the original Switch you can use that to play VB games.



» [Virtual Boy] The underwater scenes are actually quite fun in this game – providing you have the dragon hat to blast baddies.

Magazine also praised the visuals, awarding the game 93% and commenting, "The 3D is used to excellent effect… if you have a Virtual Boy, make sure you get this game." Meanwhile, *Nintendo Magazine System* awarded the game 89%. "[It's] a real treat for those poor Virtual Boy owners who've been starved of half-decent software," it concluded, before commenting on the game's brevity. "If only there were a few more levels this would've rated as a classic."

WHY IT'S A HIDDEN GEM

That's an easy one – the game is locked to the poorest selling standalone console in Nintendo's history. Less than 800K Virtual Boys were sold, despite it being heavily discounted to attract attention. Of the 22 officially released games, *Virtual Boy Wario Land* is widely considered to be the best title available. Some might even argue that it's the only good game on the system. But it's not just the best of a bad bunch; it's an excellent platformer and one of the most entertaining entries in the *Wario Land* series.

WHERE YOU CAN PLAY IT

For the longest time the only way to play the game legitimately was on the original hardware. The problem there was that, in recent years, finding a working Virtual Boy for a reasonable price was nigh-on impossible. Then in February this year, Nintendo surprised everyone by making the system available through its Switch Online + Expansion Pack membership. To reproduce the 3D effect, it also released a Virtual Boy replica (plus a cheaper cardboard alternative) which housed your Switch or Switch 2.

> "The game is locked to the poorest selling standalone console in Nintendo's history. Less than 800K Virtual Boys were sold…"

Virtual Boy Wario Land was included in the initial library of seven games, and more have since been added, including a couple of previously cancelled titles: top-down platformer *Dragon Hopper* and *F-Zero* spin-off *Zero Racers*. And the best bit – you can finally change the frankly unappealing red-and-black display to a different colour. This surprise comeback of the Virtual Boy gives many more gamers the chance to experience the 'lost' *Wario Land*. Nice one Nintendo. ✱

IN THE SAME VEIN

SIMILAR GAMES TO TRY AFTER BESTING VIRTUAL BOY WARIO LAND

Wario Land 3
2000

■ All of the *Wario Land* Game Boy games are great, but this entry for the Game Boy Color is a standout, thanks to its heavier focus on Metroidvania elements and large expansive levels. Obviously, if you just want to smash stuff and flatten enemies then there's plenty of that too.

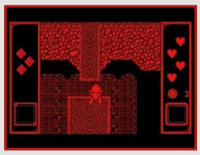
Donkey Kong Country Returns
2010

■ Retro Studios' amazing reboot of the *DKC* series for the Wii is a standalone classic. Its destructive platforming feels a lot like a *Wario Land* title, but we've selected it here because it implements the idea of jumping into the background from the Virtual Boy game.

Pizza Tower
2023

■ With the GBA game *Wario Land 4* cited as a major influence on its gameplay and structure, *Pizza Tower* from indie outfit Tour De Pizza is perfect for fans longing for a new *Wario* platformer. It's highly rated for good reason. The similar *Antonblast* (2024) is also very good.

Dragon Hopper
2026



■ *Virtual Boy Wario Land* was the only real platformer on the Virtual Boy – until this year, when *Dragon Hopper* from Intelligent Systems was added to the Virtual Boy library on the Nintendo Switch. This game was originally due to come out in 1996. Three decades later we finally get to play it.

GAIL TILDEN

We sit down with 24-year veteran of Nintendo Of America, Gail Tilden, to chat about launching the Nintendo Entertainment System, creating Nintendo's first newsletter, running Nintendo Power Magazine and bringing Pokémon to the West

Words by James Tocchio

Gail Tilden spent a quarter-century at Nintendo, helping shape some of the company's biggest products and fandoms. Joining Nintendo Of America in July 1983, she became advertising manager two months later and helped bring the Nintendo Entertainment System to American audiences following the infamous US game industry crash of 1983. After introducing the no-charge *Nintendo Fun Club News* newsletter with Howard Phillips, which grew to 600,000 subscribers, she led the launch of *Nintendo Power* magazine in 1988 and served as editor in chief during its early years. She became vice president of brand management in 1998, working on major initiatives including *Pokémon*'s US launch. In 2007 Tilden left Nintendo to work as a consultant.

» Gail Tilden poses with Beavis and Butthead at CES.

Can you remember the first moment that the idea of a *Nintendo Power* magazine was dreamed up, Gail?
I was on maternity leave about a month after my son was born, and I was called in to meet with two different Japanese publishing companies about starting a subscription-based magazine.

The one that won the business was Tokuma Shoten and they became co-publishers. It wasn't called *Nintendo Power* yet. The name *Nintendo Power* was ultimately President [Minoru] Arakawa's call. We talked about calling it *Power Player*, and he felt 'Nintendo' should be part of the name.

***Nintendo Power* had a very distinct tone: enthusiastic, authoritative, almost like a trusted older sibling helping readers through games. How consciously did you and your team craft that editorial voice?**
It was very intentional, but not manipulative. We set a gamer-to-gamer tone pretty much from the beginning [and we] respected the player and wrote with a vocabulary that worked for about a 12-year-old level and up. There was limited mention of things like 'your parents' or 'your school' as we were using more of a peer-to-peer voice.

What did you see as the real mission of *Nintendo Power*? Was the goal to compete with other magazines on news coverage, to entertain, or to help players get more from their games?
We were never the leader for news. News was not really the thing. The mission of the magazine was to make sure that people could enjoy playing their games and enjoy getting all the way to the end. We provided help and information similar to player's guides.

So, helping players get deeper into the games was really at the heart of it?
My son, he's 36 now, and I came back from having a baby to start *Nintendo Power*, so he's my '*Nintendo Power* Baby'. And he would be like, "Mom, I don't want you to bring home the game unless you bring home the player's guide." And he would sit in front of the TV with, like, the *Zelda* player's guide and would want to know every single thing.

The maps are still considered some of the finest strategy guides ever produced. How were those maps made? Did artists and editors play through entire games together, and how much time could go into creating a single map?
One of the reasons we selected Tokuma as our partner was that they had a content firm called Work House in Tokyo that had developed a way to capture screens and assemble these maps. Editors assigned to each article did have to know the game inside and out to confirm that the call outs of obstacles and bonuses were correctly placed. Howard Phillips also reviewed the articles in the proofing stage to look for accuracy. He had an amazing memory for game details.

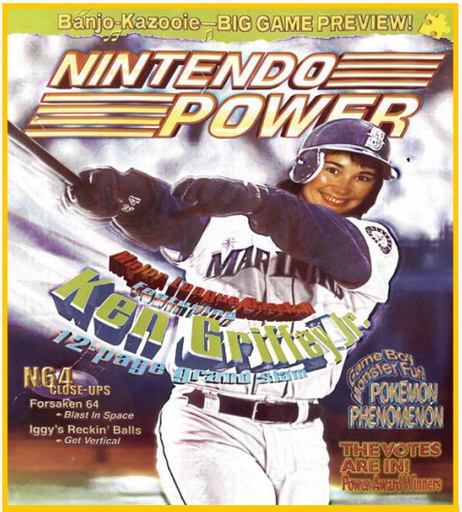
Producing *Nintendo Power* every month must have been incredibly demanding. What did creating a typical issue look like?
During the first few years, since the magazine was produced bi-culturally, each issue required two international trips. That meant some pretty jet-lagged staff.

> The mission of the magazine was to make sure that people could enjoy playing their games
>
> Gail Tilden

SELECTED TIMELINE

- **NES NORTH AMERICAN LAUNCH** [1985]
- **NINTENDO FUN CLUB NEWS** [1986]
- **NINTENDO POWER MAGAZINE** [1988]
- **NINTENDO.COM** [1995]
- **PROMOTED TO VP OF BRAND MANAGEMENT** [1998]
- **POKÉMON US LAUNCH** [1998]

» Gail Tilden and Howard Phillips ran into one another earlier this year and snapped this picture.



» When Gail Tilden left *Nintendo Power*, the staff made spoof covers for her departure.

» Mr Arakawa, president of Nintendo, with Howard Phillips and Gail Tilden and others at CES 1989.

» Gail Tilden, Scott Pelland and Leslie Swan, *Nintendo Power* staffers at E3. Plus The Giant, as he was known in WCW.

Did the Japanese Nintendo staff have access to *Nintendo Power*, and did they offer any thoughts on what you were producing?
We sent issues over every month, but we didn't really communicate as much as you might think.

Because *Nintendo Power* was produced so closely alongside Nintendo itself, you often had access that other magazines could only dream of. Was there ever a moment when you realised, "We're seeing gaming history happen before everyone else"?
A very cool part of being in-house was access to all the compatible games for Nintendo's systems. Although licensees often pitched their games to other mags, Nintendo's first-party assets were reserved for *Nintendo Power*.

And licensees who were developing games for Nintendo's systems, as part of their agreement, their contract with Nintendo would have said that anything would be shared with Nintendo's marketing team and *Nintendo Power*. That was just part of the agreement. So, if Capcom, for example, was developing a game, they really didn't have a choice as to whether or not Nintendo would be publishing information about the game via *Nintendo Power*.

You also worked closely with some of Nintendo's legendary creators. What was it like collaborating with Nintendo developers, and were there any interactions that changed the way you thought about games?
Back in the Eighties and early Nineties, Nintendo Of America operated independently as a marketing and distribution company. Game localisation was limited to a few text bubbles for most games and almost no speech recording. One of my favourite interactions was in Tokyo reviewing our guide for *The Legend Of Zelda: A Link To The Past* with Mr Miyamoto. He wanted to make sure that any lore that was shared in the guide would not be restrictive on future gaming ideas.

You mentioned working with Yoshio Sakamoto, the creator of *Metroid*. What was your relationship like?
I had a good close relationship with Mr Sakamoto. And he's such a funny [person] and kind of shy. I had him over to my house because we were trying to make a *Metroid* movie, but I remember I told him that I like minigames, like the idea of silly, kind of time-based games. And Nintendo was very supportive of his sense of humour with *WarioWare*. You know, a bunch of those guys [Nintendo employees] play music together, and stuff like that. Anyway, they're just nice guys.

You also mentioned Mr Arakawa, Nintendo's then-president. What was it about his leadership style that made such a lasting impression on you?
Mr Arakawa was amazing. His vision and risk-taking on things, that is really what made us so successful. His belief that I could do things. You know, he said, "You go make a videogame magazine." And I said, "Ahh, OK." He gave a lot of us, a lot of people of my era, confidence because he had a lot of confidence in us. He was great about giving people opportunities to do new, crazy things.

***Nintendo Power* was more than just the magazine. The strategy guides, posters, trading cards and VHS tapes felt like part of the experience. How did those ideas come about, and do you have a favourite promotional item that almost didn't happen?**
These are some of my favourite things because marketing and branding is really my forte. But generally, we at Nintendo Of America or *Nintendo Power* didn't make the screenshots or maps. Our co-publisher Tokuma Shoten

had a design studio that did the maps and the screens and everything. They developed a technique for doing it, so we didn't do it in our office. In fact, we worked with a few different agencies that created these extras.

An idea I pitched that wasn't successful was to offer a free or discounted version of what I named *The Lost Levels Of Super Mario* as a follow on to the *Dragon Warrior* giveaway. I felt it was an opportunity that wasn't being tapped. (Of course, these are the levels that you get after you beat the arcade version of *Super Mario Bros.*) I was shot down on the offer, but the game did appear later in a compilation of *Mario* games. Other ideas were frequently part of a brainstorming session with the team where the philosophy was 'there are no bad ideas'.

***Nintendo Power*'s promotional VHS tapes have become almost as collectible as the magazine itself. Where did the idea for shipping promo tapes to subscribers come from?**

The internet was still young, maybe you had AOL or something, but not very big websites, so there weren't many outlets besides the magazine, or if you saw something in a store, or a TV commercial. So those physical marketing ideas were important. I didn't work on many of these directly, but I did work on the VHS tape for *Donkey Kong Country* and *Pokémon*.

The *Donkey Kong Country* tape is one that fans seem to remember very vividly.

Because of *Donkey Kong Country*, they started calling [Nintendo Of America's product development team] The Treehouse, and they worked with me and my group to make that video. We knew it made a big impact, not just because of *DKC*, but also because of the reveal of *KI* [*Killer Instinct*] at the end. When Rare was developing *DKC* and *KI* and came up with that 3D technique, it was really secretive, top secret, so it made that [VHS tape] project super fun. I'm sure it was Mr Arakawa, our president, who would have come up with this idea, and it was such a great way to show everyone how new and different this 3D technique was going to be. Especially because at some point, Nintendo was starting to get hammered with who has more bits and bytes. So that really showcased the [game's graphics] really well.

It must have been exciting to be among the first people to see these new, innovative games.

Of course, and that was always the case. Through the magazine's Player Poll and feedback, we had no doubt that readers were thrilled to see these videos too.

Producing a magazine that was so closely tied to Nintendo's latest products must also have brought some difficult assignments. Do you recall any moments of extreme pressure or stress?

I'm thinking about the Virtual Boy. You know, there was nothing worse than thinking about the Virtual Boy. But thankfully it was short-lived.

Some people really love the Virtual Boy!

Well, it was just tough for us [at *Nintendo Power*], with it giving people headaches, and the whole 3D-ness of it. I think that's cool now, especially knowing what you can do now with [virtual reality] headsets, but, you know, seriously. Some weird, red display, it reminded me of being at the eye doctor and getting an eye test.

> "There's just no way that Virtual Boy games are going to outshine other games"
> Gail Tilden

Was it difficult to cover in the magazine?

It was a situation like *Tetris*, which we had to write a lot about. For *Tetris*, we had to do a cover, a 16-page insert; it was one of those things where Mr Arakawa himself says, "You've got to give *Tetris* coverage in *Nintendo Power*." And how do you give good coverage to something like [*Tetris*]? Similarly, how do you give coverage to the Virtual Boy, a 3D system, all-red display, laser lines on a screen. That was why the Virtual Boy was so difficult for me. It wasn't fun to put those issues together. Initially, of course, you're excited to see something new. It's in 3D. That's exciting. But the truth of it is, it's like a ROB The Robot. The reality is that it's not fun, and then being *Nintendo Power*, [when something isn't fun] that's especially not fun.

There's just no way that Virtual Boy games are going to outshine other games, and

GAIL'S WORKS

Five Projects That Defined Gail Tilden's Career

NES

■ Gail joined Nintendo Of America in 1983 and became involved in advertising and public relations. She helped market the Nintendo Entertainment System to American gamers, developing grassroots marketing to distinguish the system from earlier videogame consoles following the crash of the United States' game industry.

NINTENDO FUN CLUB NEWS

■ Before *Nintendo Power*, Gail and 'Game Master' Howard Phillips helped create the free *Nintendo Fun Club News*. The publication gave players game info, tips, and news. It eventually reached 600,000 subscribers, laying the foundation for a paid magazine.

NINTENDO POWER

■ Gail led the launch of *Nintendo Power* in 1988 and served as its editor in chief during its formative years. Working with Japanese publishing partner Tokuma Shoten, she helped establish the magazine's distinctive gamer-to-gamer voice, combining game guides, maps, news and Nintendo's wider marketing initiatives.

POKÉMON

■ After moving into marketing, Gail worked on bringing *Pokémon* to the United States. The ambitious campaign combined television, direct mail, mall tours and events, including Pikachu-themed Volkswagen Beetles touring America after a high-profile kick-off featuring parachuting performers in Kansas.

MY LITTLE PONY CARD GAME

■ After leaving Nintendo in 2007, Gail continued working as a freelance consultant. Among her post-Nintendo projects was work connected with the *My Little Pony* card game, applying the marketing and brand-management experience she had developed during 24 years at Nintendo.

NINTENDO POWER'S GAME MASTER

When a warehouse manager became Nintendo's most-recognised employee

■ Long before there were YouTube playthroughs and gaming influencers, Nintendo had a man named Howard Phillips. At age 22, Howard became the fifth employee of Nintendo Of America when he accepted a role managing the company's first warehouse in Tukwila, Washington. He spent those early days coordinating shipments of *Donkey Kong* arcade cabinets, a job which made him the Port Of Seattle's largest volume shipping manager. Within two years he would become one of Nintendo's most recognisable figures, known for his encyclopaedic knowledge of the company's games.

After the American launch of the NES, which he was instrumental in, he set up the Game Counselor Hotline, a toll-free number which players could call to receive tips and tricks on games from real-live human beings. He then worked with Gail Tilden to create the *Nintendo Fun Club News*, a free newsletter to which players could subscribe. By June 1988 the newsletter had amassed 600,000 subscribers. In August of that year, he and Tilden launched *Nintendo Power* magazine.

Howard's role at *Nintendo Power* was multi-faceted. He fact-checked the guides, liaised with retailers to ensure the magazine's coverage was focussing on what the players wanted, and advocated for players. His most memorable role, however, may have been as himself.

Beginning with the earliest issues, Howard starred alongside the fictional red-haired, Nintendo-obsessed know-it-all Nester in the *Howard And Nester* comics. The comic strips mixed humour with practical game guide advice. A typical run might find Nester charging through *Castlevania II*'s Bodley Mansion with a couple of gamer kids, confidently leading the way to a brick-wall dead end. At just that moment, Phillips would come around the corner with his red bow tie and casually correct Nester's brash overconfidence.

Howard and Nester ran through all the greatest NES games, including *Super Mario Bros 2* and *3*, *DuckTales*, *Track & Field II*, *Maniac Mansion*, *Ninja Gaiden*, and games from the *The Legend Of Zelda* and *Mega Man* series.

In June 1991, Howard was written out of the strip after he left Nintendo to work at LucasArts. But for a whole generation of *Nintendo Power* subscribers, Howard would always be the Game Master.

even though it's a Nintendo-published magazine, you want to have [editorial] principles, so you resist making something like the Virtual Boy a star.

Despite those difficult assignments, did you ever hear from readers in a way that made you realise just how important *Nintendo Power* had become to kids and families?

When it comes to *Nintendo Power*, it was completely my pleasure. More recently I've heard from readers who went through some difficult times as a kid or teen and the magazine arriving in the mailbox was one of their bright spots. This really makes me reflect on how much value was added beyond the content itself.

> "I've heard from readers who went through some difficult times as a kid or teen and the magazine arriving in the mailbox was one of their bright spots"
> Gail Tilden

Later in your Nintendo career, you moved into marketing and brand development. Can you tell us about your work around the launch of *Pokémon* in the USA?

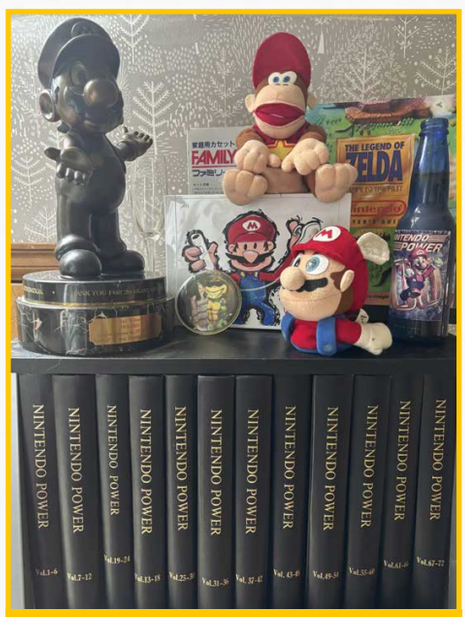
That goes back to the VHS tapes we talked about, but we did a lot more than that for *Pokémon*. With the *Pokémon* videos, I was directly involved with approving scripts and being on site for shoots, and reviewing edit copy, and stuff like that. We really wanted kids to tune into the show right from the beginning, because the show came out a couple of weeks before the game and we really didn't know if people were going to embrace the game. The Game Boy game wasn't really what we were looking at as the full measurement of success, in fact. And one interesting thing about the way that show was launched is the show itself was not on a network. We built a network through something we called 'barter syndication'. We made a deal with, I think, 80 different TV stations all over the country. And for the first six months or so, that's the way the show was broadcast.

How did that unusual television launch affect the *Pokémon* VHS campaign?

This affected the VHS tapes, specifically, in that each physical VHS tape had the station information printed on it based on the addressee's ZIP code. So even though that VHS promo tape had some info about the Game Boy game and the card game, it was really a way to get kids to watch the show.

It's interesting to hear that a massive hit as *Pokémon* had such a grassroots marketing campaign initially.

Yes, well, we/Mr Arakawa thought that we had to do more to get it in front of kids than just run TV commercials or our traditional marketing. So the tape was one tactic within that concept. But there were others as well. When we launched the NES in the mid-Eighties, we did a lot of mall tours. We



» A collection of memorabilia from Gail Tilden's time at Nintendo.

» The *Super Power Supplies Catalog* could make you the coolest kid in elementary school.

» *Nintendo Power* sometimes ran special serialised comics, including this one during the run-up to *Super Metroid*'s release.

» The magazine's Player's Pulse encouraged people to send letters, and would publish some of the coolest envelope art.

set up the games and had people get their hands and eyes on them, so they would believe it more than seeing a TV commercial, and we had these displays where you could play in the store. The investment in hands-on experiences at that time was big. And with *Pokémon* we did mall tours as well, where you could get certain Pokémon if you went to the mall event.

And the *Pokémon* kick-off was really special. Can you tell us about that?

If you know your Nintendo history, it was called Topikachu Kansas. We renamed Topeka, Kansas for one day and had an event where people dressed as Pikachu parachuted down from the sky and jumped into Pikachu-themed Volkswagen Beetles and drove off around the country with a TV in the back of the Beetle, and toys, and info packets. They went to parks or theme parks, all these places where kids would be for the last couple weeks of summer, because the show started just after Labor Day. So kids could get hands-on exposure to what *Pokémon* was.

And obviously *Pokémon* was a big success. Were there any marketing projects that maybe weren't so successful?

Of course. When Mr Iwata became president, Nintendo wanted to appeal to people from five to ninety-five, with games like *Brain Training*, and cooking games, *Nintendogs*, and things like that. I wasn't involved in those, but I was in a kind of brainstorming group for non-traditional games. For example, we were trying to make a finance game for kids with Warren Buffett. We never came up with a good game, so it never came out.

Do you ever look back on those early marketing days and miss the culture around launching new products with hands-on physical events? It seems like they're much less common within the industry these days.

I think that type of marketing would still work and be fun. I think that people would probably find that it's not a very efficient way to market today, so that makes it tough to invest money. The evolution, or replacement of that type of marketing might be con culture. People go to Comic Con or PAX, for example, and people can interact with brands and reps, and get hands-on exposure.

Looking back at your 24 years with Nintendo, what does the legacy of *Nintendo Power* mean to you today?

I was always overly committed to any project I was asked to take on. It was amazing to be creating an original product outside of the games themselves and to build a small business inside of the greater company. The legacy wasn't the focus [at the time] but it is [now] something I am most proud of from my 24 years with the company. ★

» *Nintendo Power* often shipped with pack-in materials, such as these 3D glasses and 3D cards from 1995's Virtual Boy issue.

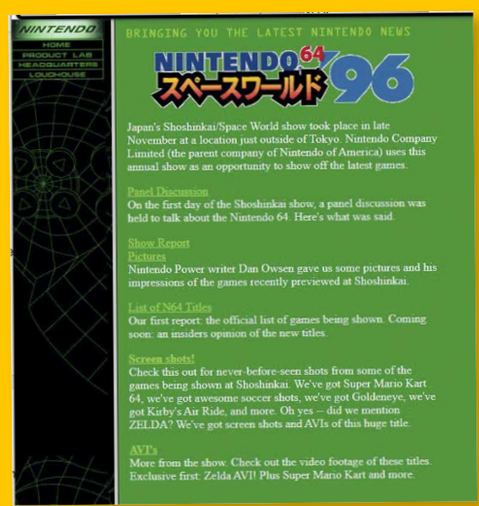
NINTENDO ONLINE

Connecting with Nintendo players in the information age

■ Gail Tilden's career at Nintendo was largely defined by one thing: communication. She spent most of her 24 years finding new ways to connect the company with its fans. First came the *Nintendo Fun Club News* newsletter, then *Nintendo Power*, and eventually the internet.

After helping to build one of gaming's most successful magazines (*Nintendo Power* was in fact the United States' longest-running gaming magazine when it ended its run in 2012), Gail's publishing responsibilities expanded to include shepherding Nintendo's early online presence. Beginning in 1995, Gail brought the same direct-to-player communication philosophy that she'd cultivated at the magazine to the new and rapidly changing internet.

The earliest days of Nintendo.com gave fans a chance to explore the latest games, subscribe to online newsletters, join The LoudHouse, an early online forum for fans to chat directly with each other, and read all about upcoming games. In 1996, the site even featured an incredibly detailed look at Nintendo's Shoshinkai 1996, Nintendo's trade show which would later be known as Space World.


NINTENDO
HOME
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LOUDHOUSE
BRINGING YOU THE LATEST NINTENDO NEWS
NINTENDO64 スペースワールド96
Japan's Shoshinkai/Space World show took place in late November at a location just outside of Tokyo. Nintendo Company Limited (the parent company of Nintendo of America) uses this annual show as an opportunity to show off the latest games.
Panel Discussion
On the first day of the Shoshinkai show, a panel discussion was held to talk about the Nintendo 64. Here's what was said.
Show Report
Pictures
Nintendo Power writer Dan Owsen gave us some pictures and his impressions of the games recently previewed at Shoshinkai.
List of N64 Titles
Our first report: the official list of games being shown. Coming soon: an insiders opinion of the new titles.
Screen shots!
Check this out for never-before-seen shots from some of the games being shown at Shoshinkai. We've got Super Mario Kart 64, we've got awesome soccer shots, we've got Goldeneye, we've got Kirby's Air Ride, and more. Oh yes -- did we mention ZELDA? We've got screen shots and AVIs of this huge title.
AVI's
More from the show. Check out the video footage of these titles. Exclusive first: Zelda AVI! Plus Super Mario Kart and more.

SUPER NES
GAME INFO
game list
back to game info
site help
Kirby's Dream Land 3
Everyone's favorite planet-saving pink puff is back for five stages and 30 levels of non-stop fun! A threatening cloud of Dark Matter is luring the inhabitants of PopStar to evil, but not if Kirby & Co. have anything to say about it!
Kirby's tried-and-true tactic is to inhale enemies, which he can then spit out at other enemies. If Kirby swallows an opponent, he may absorb the opponent's special powers. The Kirbster can become a roaring fireball, scorching lightning bolt and indestructible rock. Other
SUPER NINTENDO
Title: Kirby's Dream Land 3
ESRB: K-A
Type of Game: Action
Released: November 1997
Number of Players: 1-2 simultaneous
Size: 32 megabits
Save: Yes
Developer: HAL Laboratories
Publisher: Nintendo

Freedom Fighters

FIGHTING WORDS FOR A LIVING

RETROREVIVAL

» GAMECUBE » 2003
» IO INTERACTIVE

I never planned on being a production editor (nor the kinkier-sounding previous job title of sub editor), it just sort of worked out that way. I'd just missed a round of interviews for staff writers at Paragon Publishing, so the next best thing was production editor. It'd be a foot in the door I reckoned. I flew over to Bournemouth, did an interview for a film magazine… and didn't hold my breath. I didn't hear much for a while until I was sent a subbing test for *Cube* magazine, and did another interview over the phone. And only flipping got the job! (At Highbury Entertainment, Paragon having been bought by Highbury by the time I arrived.)

So not long after I started I asked if I could start writing reviews, and got the go-ahead. Luckily, my first review for *Cube* was a doozy (usually the new guy gets all the crap foisted upon them, just look at the rubbish Ryan King got lumped with when he started). *Freedom Fighters* is a squad-based third-person shooter set in an alternate timeline with Russia invading the USA. You play as plumber Chris, whose brother has been kidnapped by the Russians, and it's up to you and a gaggle of resistance soldiers to take the country back. I loved the way you'd complete missions to raise your Charisma so you can recruit more and more soldiers to your squad. Then you can rip through the streets gunning down enemies with a load of friendlies watching your back. That is until their AI goes a bit wonky and they all get shot to ribbons when they go off and try to take down a gun emplacement, even though you're shouting at them to run.

Still, *Freedom Fighters* is a great game well worth checking out, and I was very lucky to have that as my first review in the mag. ✱

RETRORATED

>> This month we return to Silent Hill, battle demon hordes in Orc Incremental and play the latest compilations from M2 and Digital Eclipse

» [PC] This big beastie is one of the weakest aspects of the game. Fortunately, it doesn't appear too often.

✱ PICKS OF THE MONTH

DARRAN

Evercade: Visco Arcade 1

It's been out for a while now, but it's filled with a good variety of games, including *Drift Out* and *Galmedes* and has proven hard to put down.

MARTYN

Midwinter Fan Remaster

I'm getting ready for the colder weather by playing this remaster, which is currently in Early Access on Steam.

TIM

Final Fantasy VII Rebirth

Finally (ha!) finished the main story and nearly welled-up at the end. Yes I knew it was (kind of?) coming, but damn. Roll on April 2027.

Silent Hill: Townfall

SCREEN BURN REIGNITES KONAMI'S CREEPY HORROR SERIES

INFORMATION

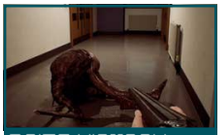
- **SYSTEM:** PC
- **ALSO ON:** PLAYSTATION 5
- **PRICE:** £44.98
- **RELEASED:** 24 SEPT 2026
- **PUBLISHER:** KONAMI
- **DEVELOPER:** SCREEN BURN INTERACTIVE
- **PLAYERS:** 1

***PT,* Hideo Kojima's aborted attempt to reboot *Silent Hill* proved just how effective shifting the action to a first-person perspective could be for the series.** Screen Burn Interactive has run with that idea and delivered a game that, while not quite as strong as the original trilogy, proves that there's still plenty of life in Konami's long-running series.

One of the strengths of *Townfall* is just how well it adheres to the typical *Silent Hill* tropes. There's a flawed protagonist, Simon Ordell, who finds himself back in the small Scottish island town of St Amelia with no idea of how he came to be there. There are puzzles that will delight and frustrate in equal measure, limited supplies that can often be combined to create more useful items, a host of locked doors and a large number of grotesque-looking monsters to avoid.

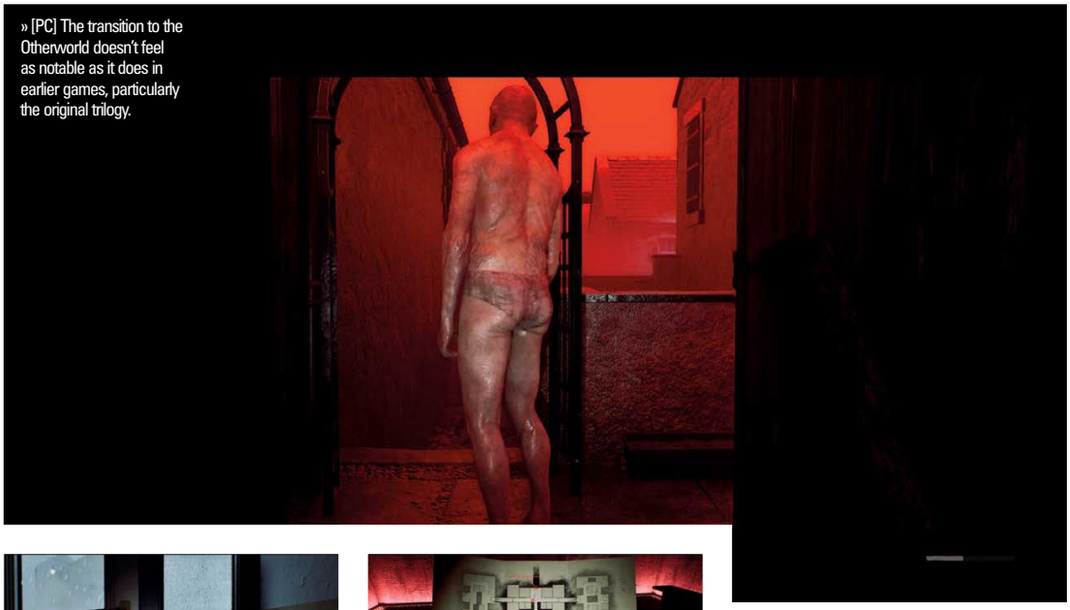
As Simon explores the abandoned town he'll interact with Zoe Ellis, a local nurse who he clearly has some sort of connection to, as well as Richard,

» [PC] There's a great story at the heart of *Townfall* with plenty of twists and turns along the way.



BRIEF HISTORY

» The original *Silent Hill* debuted on Sony's PlayStation in 1999 and set itself apart from the likes of *Resident Evil* with its focus on psychological horror. Several games followed on Sony's PlayStation 2 until the original Team Silent disbanded in 2006. Later games in the series, including *Origins, Homecoming* and *Downpour* failed to recapture the magic of the earlier games for many, although *Shattered Memories* (a remake of the original game) is one of the highlights from this period. More recently, Konami has revived the series with a great remake of *Silent Hill 2, Silent Hill f* and now *Townfall.* A remake of the original game is also currently in the works.



» [PC] The transition to the Otherworld doesn't feel as notable as it does in earlier games, particularly the original trilogy.

» [PC] Your CRTV is essential for tracking monsters and learning where you need to go next.

» [PC] There are a number of maps Simon can rely on but some are harder to read than others.

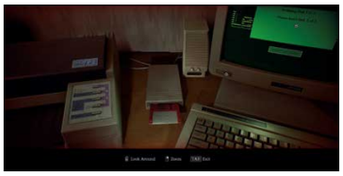
a mysterious fellow whose urgent request via a portable CRTV kicks off Simon's quest. Their paths cross several times across the story, which is well crafted and draws from many of *Silent Hill*'s most popular themes.

Simon's CRTV is more than just a simple plot device, it's a way for Screen Burn to prod you along as you explore the creepy, dishevelled-looking ghost town. Tuning into certain frequencies will offer hints at where you need to go next or reveal important story beats, while it can also be used to track (and hopefully avoid) the game's many monsters.

Alongside your CRTV, ST Amelia is filled with doorways and other nooks and crannies that Simon can use to avoid detection. While you'll eventually find weapons, including a few firearms, stealth is normally your best option and it's telling that you'll be shown how much you've stayed hidden as part of your final score upon completing the game.

While this tense game of cat and mouse works well, it does diminish somewhat once you encounter one of the game's more deadlier foes. At several points of the game you'll be stalked by an unkillable beast that will kill you in no short order if it catches you. Sadly, its AI isn't the best and you can easily outfox it by hiding in a locker, even when it sees you disappear into it. Add in the fact that it's always just outside your periphery (even if you move to a different location via the area's many tunnel systems) and these stages become more of an exercise in frustration rather than creating any actual tension.

These sections clearly allude to the brilliant atmosphere created in games like *Alien Isolation* or *Outlast*, but the sense of fear found in those titles simply isn't there and you end up being annoyed rather than frightened on the few occasions that the lumbering monstrosity turns up to menace you.



» [PC] Kudos to Screen Burn for turning tedious disk-swapping into part of a larger puzzle.

» [PC] In a neat touch, you use phones to save your progress.

Thankfully, the rest of the game's monster encounters are far stronger, as too are the puzzles you'll encounter. Not only are they often cleverly constructed, but they fit in thematically with whatever you're doing, whether it's tending to a patient or working out the cause of the calamity that hit St Amelia. They feel like genuine natural obstacles that need to be cleared and become quite ingenious the further you descend into Simon's adventure.

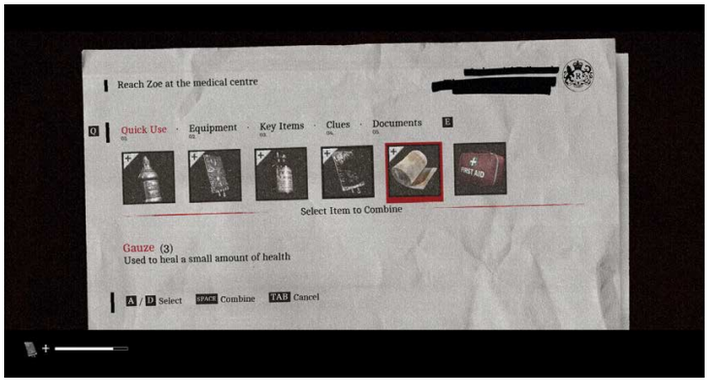
There's a pleasing sense of familiarity to *Townfall* as well, which will please those who felt *Silent Hill f* was too much of a departure from the series. Classic locations like hospitals and apartment buildings all feature, there's a strong psychological examination of the key characters and the general atmosphere throughout is terrific. The transition to the Otherworld isn't as strong as I'd like (often feeling like little more than a red filter has been applied to locations) but the strong story and Screen Burn's excellent reimagining of a quaint Nineties-based Scottish town helps pull you in.

I really enjoyed my time in *Townfall* and, as is traditional with the series, there are plenty of reasons to return to it once the main game has finished. While the game's stealth elements can be hit and miss at times, the strong story, excellent voice acting, engaging puzzles and oppressive atmosphere proves that Screen Burn not only understood the task at hand when it took on the *Silent Hill* series, but absolutely nailed it. ✱

In a nutshell

There are a few weak elements, but this is another great entry in Konami's popular series, thanks to strong writing, neat puzzles and some genuinely interesting characters.

≫ Score **80%**



» [PC] There are plenty of items to discover in *Townfall* and many can be combined for stronger effects.

✱ WHY NOT TRY

▼ SOMETHING OLD
PROJECT ZERO (XBOX)

▼ SOMETHING NEW
RESIDENT EVIL VILLAGE (PC)

★ PICK OF THE MONTH

INFORMATION

- **FORMAT:** PLAYSTATION 4
- **ALSO ON:** SWITCH
- **RELEASED:** OUT NOW
- **PRICE:** £24.99+ (DIGITAL), £39.99 (PHYSICAL)
- **PUBLISHER:** CLEAR RIVER GAMES
- **DEVELOPER:** M2
- **PLAYERS:** 1-2

★ WHY NOT TRY

▼ SOMETHING OLD
BATSUGUN (ARCADE)

▼ SOMETHING NEW
TOAPLAN ARCADE GARAGE: KYUKYOKU TIGER-HELI (SWITCH)

★ BRIEF HISTORY

» *Flying Shark* is a literal translation of the original Japanese title, *Hi Sho Zame*. The game was published by Taito, except for in the US where it was licensed to Romstar who renamed it *Sky Shark*. The sequel debuted in Japan as *Same! Same! Same!* before it was retitled *Fire Shark* in the West. The collection features all of these regional variations.

★ GO DEEPER

The facts behind Toaplan Arcade Garage: Flying Fire Shark

» The release is part of M2's *Toaplan Arcade Garage* series which also includes *Kyukyoku Tiger-Heli* (*Tiger-Heli* and *Twin Cobra*) and *Zero Fire* (*Zero Wing* and *Hellfire*).

» The games are also included in *Toaplan Arcade Collection Vol 1* (2025), along with several other shooters, but they don't include the *ShotTriggers* extras.

Toaplan Arcade Garage: Flying Fire Shark

SOME-FIN SPECIAL

Toaplan opens its *Arcade Garage* again – and the door must be a mechanical one that needs a good service. It has finally creaked open, giving us Westerners *Flying Fire Shark* almost five years after it debuted in Japan. I suspect most dedicated fans of Toaplan's vertical shooters will have imported a copy back then. If you're more of a casual fan like me, who loves a good arcade shmup but can't comprehend how anyone could ever 1CC one of these things, is it worth picking up now?

Let's start with what we're getting here. First up is *Flying Shark* (known as *Sky Shark* in the US), which many consider to be Toaplan's crowning glory. This 1987 shooter, which sees you piloting a biplane through five heavily fortified enemy stages, is an unquestionable arcade classic. It also found success at home thanks to its celebrated conversions by Graftgold and Software Creations. Also included is *Flying Shark*'s 1989 sequel, *Fire Shark*. The second game adds co-op play and features twice as many stages and three different weapon types – more of everything really, but it's also less well known, arriving in a crowded market and only receiving a single home conversion for the Mega Drive.

» [PlayStation 4] In Super Easy mode you're alerted to threats before they happen. Handy.

» [PlayStation 4] Playing *Fire Shark* in co-op is a must, although it gets rather manic on later stages.

As you'd expect from M2, both games have been converted with precision and care. This is also a *ShotTriggers* collection which means it comes with loads of lovely stuff on top. There are the M2 Gadgets that surround the playing field with extra readouts and a stage map – they're not too useful if I'm honest, but they certainly look cool. There's a Super Easy mode, ideal for enthusiastic amateurs like me, and also an Arcade Challenge mode which breaks the game up into more digestible bite-size chunks and features a handy rewind function.

Alongside the arcade games are two home versions – the NES version of *Flying Shark* and the Mega Drive version of *Fire Shark*. Also included is *Wardner* (aka *Pyros*), Toaplan's side-scrolling platformer from 1987. This is an odd choice. *Wardner* is a fine game, but surely Toaplan's *Twin Hawk*, which preceded *Fire Shark* and is very much in the *Shark* mould, would have made more sense, and given us three comparable vertical shooters? I should point out that the digital download version only gives you *Flying Shark* and *Fire Shark* (plus, again, rather oddly, Toaplan's 1991 arcade puzzle game *Teki Paki*). The home versions and *Wardner* are available separately as DLC available for around £12. If you want the works in one ownable package you should obviously consider the physical edition.

» [PlayStation 4] The M2 Gadgets serve to fill up the screen space when playing in Tate mode.

Flying Fire Shark brings together two of Toaplan's best shooters and reminds us why the Japanese developer is so renowned in shmup circles. The same can be said about M2 in the preservation field. It's also pleasing to see *Fire Shark* share the billing with its more famous forerunner, as it really is a fantastic shooter, especially when played in co-op. Come for *Flying Shark*, stay for *Fire Shark*, and enjoy the extras. ★

In a nutshell

Two great arcade shooters brought together in one classy collection. So, was it worth the wait? Definitely.

>> **Score 89%**

YOUR GAME IS NOT OVER

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[Y]/[Y]

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★ PICK OF THE MONTH

Toy Story: Retro Roundup!

» **System:** PS5 (tested), PS4, Xbox Series S/X, Switch, PC » **Buy it for:** £26.99 (online) » **Buy it from:** Online, retail

The title of this new collection from Atari is a reference to *Woody's Roundup*, the TV show from the *Toy Story 2* movie. However, it makes me think more of a dictionary definition of round-up, 'a systematic gathering of things'. What we get are the games based on the first two *Toy Story* movies, across a variety of systems including regional variations, plus a trio of related PlayStation titles: *Buzz Lightyear Of Star Command*, *Toy Story Racer* and the game based on Pixar's *A Bug's Life* movie. Also included are the handheld versions of each title. So yes, an interesting and not unpleasant gathering of licensed things.

The collection is the latest from Digital Eclipse and its golden touch is all over it. There are the usual quality-of-life features that smooth out many of the rougher edges. Using the built-in cheats actually makes finishing the famously tough first *Toy Story* game a viable proposition, while there's the option to increase the internal resolution of the PS1 titles to make them less blocky. There's also an archive of behind-the-scenes goodies too, including a brilliant video on how Traveller's Tales somehow managed to get its Mega Drive game out in time for the original movie's release date.

I admire the level of effort here. In addition, Atari has had to license the games themselves as well as all the brands within the games. As a retro collection it's wonderfully presented. It's just that none of the games are anything other than standard licensed fare, and there's a limit to what Digital Eclipse can do to gloss over that.

If you want even more *Toy Story*, Atari is also releasing a separate remaster of *Toy Story 3*. This is bundled with *Retro Roundup!* on physical copies, but digitally the two releases are available as individual downloads.

>> **Score 75%**

» [PlayStation 5] The original *Toy Story* game still looks fantastic. Sadly the gameplay hasn't aged quite as well.

» [PlayStation 5] In the *Toy Story 2* game, players control Buzz on his 15-stage mission to rescue Woody.

SiN Reloaded

» **System:** PS5 (tested), PS4, Xbox Series S/X, PC, Switch » **Buy it for:** £24.99 » **Buy it from:** Online

Developed by Ritual Entertainment and released in November 1998, *SiN* was swamped by the success of *Half-Life* which was released the same month and rewrote the FPS rule book. This curio has enjoyed a resurgence of late, with Nightdive Studios republishing it for modern systems in 2020 as *SiN: Gold*. That inexpensive release does make you question this one, because while it's remastered and features some pleasing tweaks (auto pick-ups for example), it's not a whole deal different. It's still a brash Nineties FPS overloaded with wise guy cracks and rag doll physics. My 16-year-old son saw me playing this and said it looks "goofy". I've been trying to think of a better description and I'm struggling.

MARTYN CARROLL

>> **Score 60%**

Orc Incremental

» **System:** PC » **Buy it from:** Online
» **Buy it for:** £6.99

Fans of *Warcraft* will be greatly tickled by this new incremental auto-battler from Nice Ride. Starting off as a lone orc, the aim is to tackle increasingly larger waves of enemies, gaining experience so you can grow in power and recruit new monsters to your cause, which range from fire-breathing dragons to spell-flinging shamans. Once you hit a brick wall you purposely choose defeat and trade in your army for points, which can then be used to power your next. It's a great, if well-trodden system, copying the tropes of similar auto-battlers but presenting it with a nice 2D pixel-art look, a slick card system and a small level of strategy as you can choose the formation of your army. It won't tax your brain too much, but it is fun.

DARRAN JONES

>> **Score 68%**

Evercade: Visco Arcade 2

» **System:** Evercade family
» **Buy it for:** £19.99 » **Buy it from:** Online, Retail

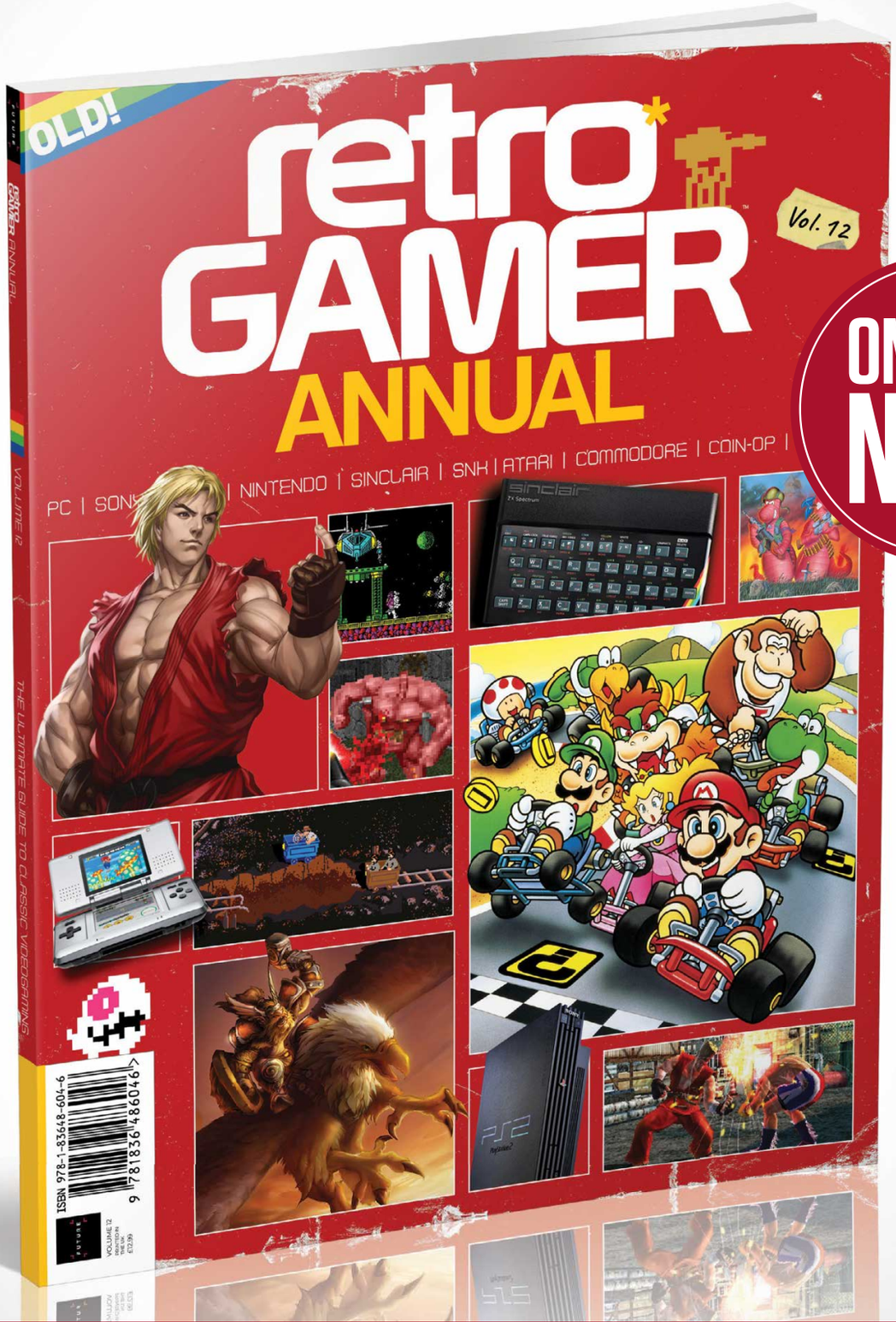
There's a lot to enjoy about this second Evercade Visco cart, even if it doubles up on similar games. *Neo Drift Out* and *Drift Out '94* are great top-down racers, Captain *Tomaday* is a cute shooter in the vein of the *Twin Bee* games, while *Bang Bang Busters* feels like a cross between *Diet Go Go* and *Snow Bros*. *Battle Flip Shot* and *Bang Bead* are two similar variations of *Windjammers*, *Breaker's* is a decent one-on-one fighter, while *Ganryu* riffs on Sega's *Shinobi*. It's all rounded off with the usual emulation quality and a slick, full-colour manual. While there's some repetitiveness to the game choices, this is still a good selection of fun titles with *Neo Drift Out* and *Bang Bang Busters* being my personal favourites.

DARRAN JONES

>> **Score 76%**

CELEBRATE THE BEST OF RETRO GAMING IN 2025

Our latest tome features an incredible amount of fantastic content from Retro Gamer's past 12 months. Iconic characters, huge franchises and classic systems all feature, making it an essential read for retro fans. Don't miss it!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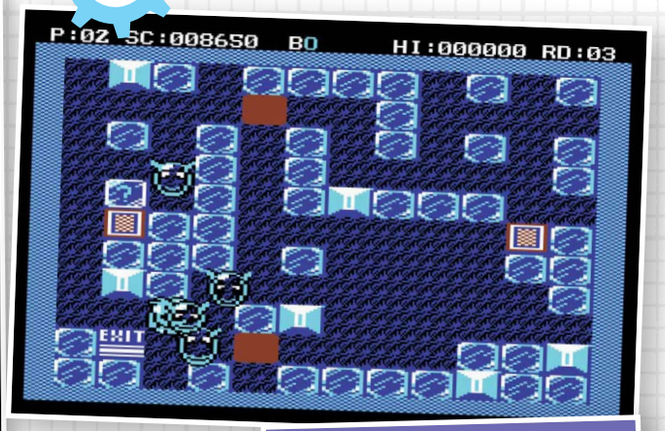
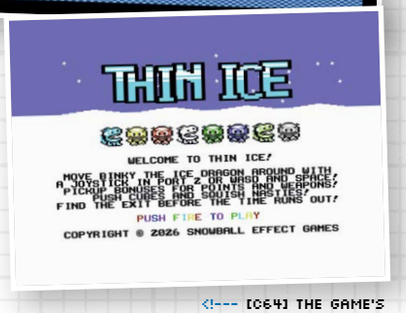
THE HOMEBREWER'S KIT

<YOUR MONTHLY GUIDE TO EVERYTHING HAPPENING IN THE HOMEBREW SCENE/>



<!--- [C64] BESIDES PUSHING ICE BLOCKS, BINKY CAN ALSO FREEZE ENEMIES WITH HIS ICY BREATH. --->


THIN ICE
WELCOME TO THIN ICE!
MOVE BINKY THE ICE DRAGON AROUND WITH A JOYSTICK IN PORT 2 OR WASD AND SPACE!
PICKUP BONUSES FOR POINTS AND WEAPONS!
PUSH ICE CUBES AND SQUISH NASTIES!
FIND THE EXIT BEFORE THE TIME RUNS OUT!
PUSH FIRE TO PLAY
COPYRIGHT © 2026 SNOWBALL EFFECT GAMES

<!--- [C64] THE GAME'S TITLE AND IN-GAME MUSIC HAS BEEN COMPOSED BY TOMAS DANKO. --->

<INTRO> THE WORLD OF HOMEBREW MOVES FAST. THESE DAYS YOU ONLY NEED TO SNEEZE AND YOU'LL MISS A COLUMNS CLONE FOR THE MATTEL AQUARIUS. WE'RE HERE TO SUMMARISE THE LATEST HOMEBREW NEWS AND SPEAK TO THOSE BRIGHT SPARKS WHO KEEP OUR OLD SYSTEMS SUPPLIED WITH NEW GAMES. IN THIS ISSUE WE CATCH UP WITH A COUPLE OF C64 DEVELOPMENT LEGENDS AND FIND OUT ABOUT THE LYNX VERSION OF WOLFENSTEIN 3D, PLUS ALL THE REGULAR STUFF. ENJOY. </INTRO>

<MAIN HEADER>

ON THIN ICE

<INTRO> WE CHAT WITH C64 STALWARTS CHRIS SHRIGLEY AND TERRY LLOYD, WHO HAVE TEAMED UP TO CREATE THIN ICE FOR THALAMUS DIGITAL </INTRO>

<BODY> **Chris and Terry have history, both together and with the C64.** What's it like, coming back to Commodore's computer after all this time?

"It's a bit surreal for me," says Chris. "They say you can never go home, but I think you can. I've had some of the best fun coding on the new C64 Ultimate that I've had in a while. It has been a genuine blast, dusting off the old assembly skills, working on very limited but completely understandable hardware. I don't think it gets much better, honestly."

"It's a blast," agrees Terry. "It's taken me back to 1986 when I first did some graphics on it for Chris." And what about working together again, creating 8-bit games? "Chris and I have known each other since 1984 and we've worked on quite a few projects together," says Terry. "Chris has his way of doing things and I have mine, so our differences become our strength when bringing it all together. And the main thing is that outside of work we have a good laugh, easy banter and can chat for hours putting the world to rights. It helps that we're both a bit mad."

"It's been a lot of fun," adds Chris. "This C64 collaboration is really just the latest madness. We get on very well, but we both have different ideas and likes when it comes to making games and the kinds of games we want to make. Terry pushes me, asking

PRIOR PEDIGREE

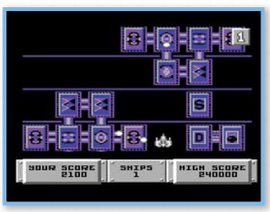
<INTRO> PREVIOUS C64 HITS BROUGHT TO YOU BY SHRIGLEY AND LLOYD </INTRO>

BOUNDER

<Brilliant bounce-'em-up that features a nice parallax scrolling effect. Superseded by *Re-Bounder*, which is less difficult and more enjoyable. />

FUTURE KNIGHT

<A fantastic title screen gives way to a decent platformer where you're pursued by respawning baddies. Style defeats substance, but it's a fun blast. />



BULLDOG

<Clever coding from Chris produces a smooth and polished shooter. It's tricky and takes a while to get the hang off, but it's worth persevering with. />

JACK THE NIPPER II

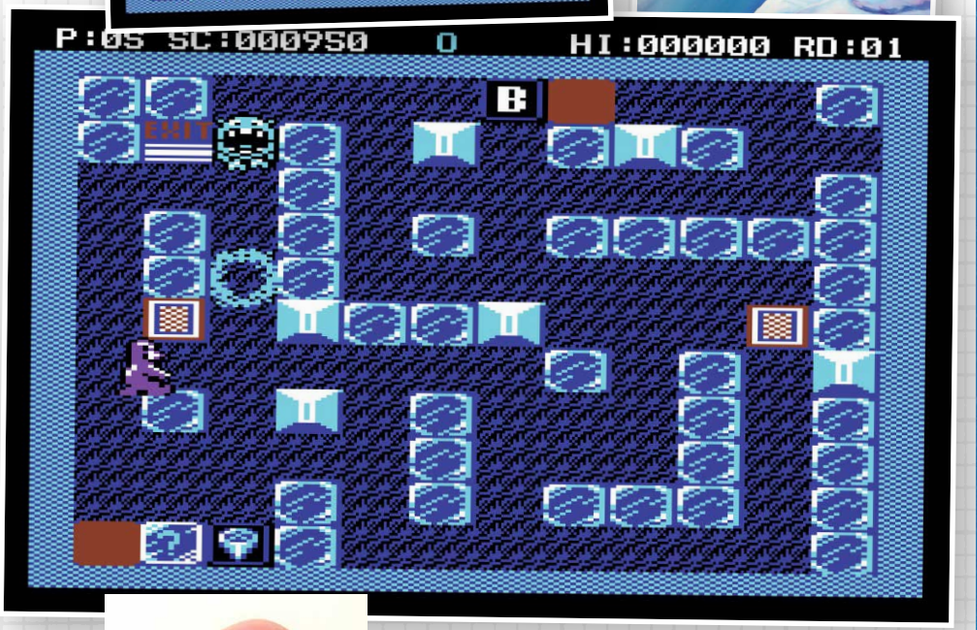
<A superb scrolling platformer in which young Jack finds himself stranded in the jungle. Features great music and jingles from Ben Daglish. />

SKATE CRAZY

<Terry's graphics and animation shine in this sports game. There are two distinct styles of game included, both of which are pretty rad. />

NEW GAMES NEEDED

Our new email address is waiting for all your homebrew news, previews and more: **retrogamer@futurenet.com**



<!--- [C64] THINGS START OUT EASY, BUT THE CHALLENGE RAMPS UP AS MORE ENEMIES SHOW UP. --->

<!--- PIXEL WIZARD TERRY LLOYD IS THE MAN BEHIND THE GAME'S CARTOON-STYLE GRAPHICS. --->

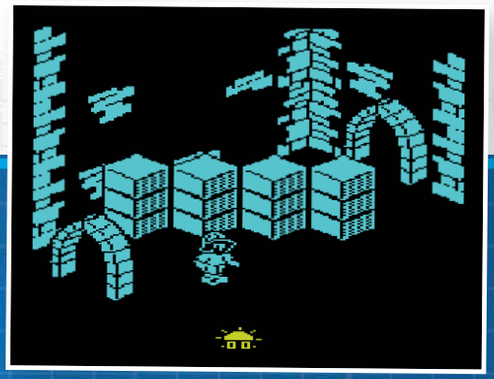
<!--- CODING SUPERSTAR CHRIS SHRIGLEY HAS RETURNED TO THE C64 TO PROGRAM THIN ICE. --->

me to do hard things. I gnash my teeth and complain at times, but it typically ends up with Terry being right, and the games being better."

In *Thin Ice* players take control of Binky, an ice dragon who must squish the nasties by pushing ice cubes. "When I worked at Gremlin I designed a game called *Ice Cubes*," says Chris, revealing the inspiration behind the project. "That was the inspiration to make an ice cube-themed game on the C64 Ultimate. As I started playing with code and mechanics, it struck me that pushing ice cubes around, à la *Pengo*, might be fun. We wanted to make a fun and simple arcade game, like you might have found in the local chippy or arcade in the Eighties. I think we succeeded and captured that feeling."

We concur, which makes us eager to find out what the pair might be cooking up next. "We're almost done with the second *Binky* game," reveals Chris. "We have a couple more planned in a series, so we're very excited about that. I wouldn't mind doing something that targets the new C64 Ultimate's expanded capabilities. Something bigger, with more scope, like an RPG." Terry has his own ideas. "Let's just say I like old platformers such as *Manic Miner* and *Miner 2049er*..."

Thin Ice is published by Thalamus Digital and is available here as a digital download: bit.ly/thalamus-thinice A physical version is also in the works. </BODY>



NEWS BYTES

<INTRO> ALL THE LATEST NEWS, HANDILY ARRANGED BY FORMAT </INTRO>

<**Atari 2600:** *No Quarter* is a fun game that's available for $5 (or more if you're feeling generous). Snap it up at bit.ly/noquarter-2600 />

<**Amiga:** The official Amiga *Out Run* was terrible. A new 40th anniversary edition makes amends. It's waiting on the start line at bit.ly/outrun-amiga Also on the Amiga, a port of the Atari 8-bit classic *Rescue On Fractalus!*, taking off at bit.ly/fractalus-amiga />

<**Amstrad CPC:** *Bomber Basic* is a simple *Bomberman* clone written entirely in, yep, BASIC. To get it, GO TO bit.ly/bomber-cpc />

<**C64:** *Ruote Fumanti* (*Smoking Wheels*) is a top-down racer with shades of *LED Storm*. Name your own price at bit.ly/fumanti-c64 />

<**Lynx:** Ubisoft's first game *Zombi* shambles onto the Lynx. Take it out (aim for the brain!) at bit.ly/zombi-lynx />

<**PC:** *Nelumbo* is a slick recreation of Gremlin's *Lotus Esprit Turbo Challenge* and its two sequels. The new version 2.0 is racing over the horizon at bit.ly/nelumbo-pc />

<**Spectrum Next:** *Fix-It Felix Jr* is back, again. The game from the *Wreck-It Ralph* movie is now available for the Next. It's free to download (from bit.ly/felix-specnext), but donations are welcomed and will go to UNICEF. />

<**VIC-20:** Homebrew is bubbling on the VIC right now. Ultimate's *Knight Lore* has previously been ported to several Commodore systems, and now it's the VIC's turn (pictured above). It's available at bit.ly/knightlore-vic There's also a version of *Pitfall II: Lost Caverns* to play, which can be grabbed at bit.ly/pitfall2-vic Finally, check out *Snapman 20*, a new *Pac-Man* clone, at bit.ly/snapman-vic All three games require 35K of RAM. />

<**ZX Spectrum:** A special *Illustrated Edition* of DJ Soft's *Dracula* adventure featuring new location graphics is in the works for 128K Spectrums. Grab the garlic and discover more at bit.ly/dracula-zx />

CHAMPION CODER

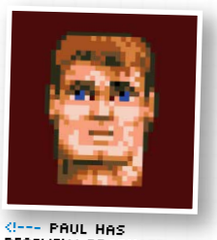
PAUL WITHERS

<INTRO> ANYONE WHO SPENDS FOUR YEARS BRINGING WOLFENSTEIN 3D TO THE ATARI LYNX IS A CHAMPION IN OUR BOOK </INTRO>

<INFO FROM: MELBOURNE, AUSTRALIA WEBSITE: PAULWITHERS.COM FORMAT: ATARI LYNX PREVIOUS PROJECTS: SUPER MARIO BROS (LYNX), REAL RACING 3 (ANDROID, IOS), SPY MOUSE (ANDROID, IOS), BACK AT THE BARNYARD: COWLYMPICS (NINTENDO DS) WORKING ON: WOLFENSTEIN (LYNX), ANOTHER WORLD (LYNX), PRINCE OF PERSIA (LYNX) />

HOW LONG HAVE YOU BEEN PROGRAMMING FOR THE LYNX, PAUL?

I took my first steps in 2017, after reading the *Diary Of An Atari Lynx Developer* series. I'd always been curious about how the Lynx worked under the hood, and what the unrealised potential of the system was.



<!--- PAUL HAS RECENTLY PRODUCED A WORKING LYNX VERSION OF SUPER MARIO BROS. --->

WHAT MADE YOU DECIDE TO TACKLE SOMETHING AS AMBITIOUS AS A WOLFENSTEIN CONVERSION?

I've always been a huge id Software fan, but it wasn't until John Romero revealed in an interview that id Software had started work on an Atari Lynx version of *Wolfenstein* that the idea really took hold. Those guys seemed to really like the Atari consoles of the time, particularly the Lynx. So after reading that and mulling it over for a while, then looking into some other ports of *Wolfenstein* to see what had been done, I realised the Lynx could do a really good job.

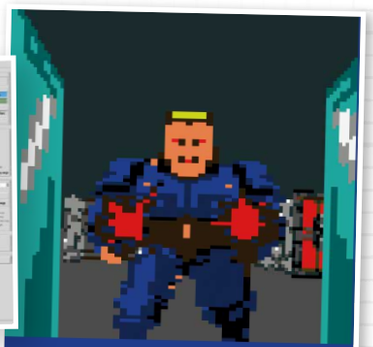
WHAT DATA AND MAP LAYOUTS WERE YOU ABLE TO TRANSFER FROM THE ORIGINAL?

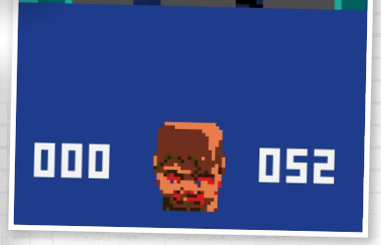
The Lynx version uses the source code from the 1994 Mac version of the game, which was itself a derivative of the Super Nintendo and Jaguar versions. It contains all of the original gameplay data and logic, all sprites and animations, wall textures, every boss and all of the levels. The entire Mac version has been squeezed into a 512K cartridge. Some of the larger maps have reduced wall complexity to fit into memory and in-game music was cut in favour of sound effects.

WHAT WOULD BE YOUR DREAM LYNX TITLE TO DEVELOP?

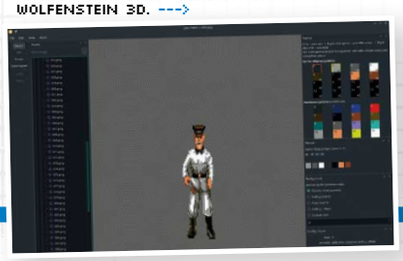
Mortal Kombat! Every system received a version, including the Game Gear and even the Game Boy. The Lynx has the potential to deliver a really great version, with big character sprites, all the backgrounds, moves and sounds, maybe even a ComLynx two-player mode. I did investigate getting it running on the Lynx and converted some *Mortal Kombat II* sprites and a background to see what it could look like… it's definitely possible. />

<!--- A GLIMPSE OF THE MAP EDITOR PAUL USES TO BUILD THE GAME'S LEVELS. --->





<!--- EDITING SPRITES FOR USE IN PAUL'S ATARI LYNX VERSION OF WOLFENSTEIN 3D. --->



DATA BURST

WOLF

<INFO FORMAT: GAME BOY COLOR CREDITS: THALAMUS DIGITAL (PUBLISHER), SHANE MCCAFFERTY (DESIGN, CODE, ART), SLOOPYGOOP (MUSIC, SFX) PRICE: $1.99 (DIGITAL) WEB: BIT.LY/THALAMUS-WOLF />

<BODY> **The Game Boy Advance was the first device in Nintendo's portable line to be capable enough to run FPSes, and famous titles like *Doom* and *Duke Nukem* were released for it.** Prior to that, there was the classic *Faceball 2000* for the original Game Boy and that was about it. The hardware just wasn't suitable. But now we have *WOLF*, an FPS for the Game Boy Color that's as ambitious as it is entertaining.

The title brings *Wolfenstein 3D* to mind, and there are of course similarities. You're trapped in a maze patrolled by enemies who will hunt you down. The aim is to shoot a certain number of enemies and recover the exit key which gives you access to the next level. By finding the Radar item the enemies' positions will be marked on your mini-map, giving you the upper hand. The mazes are procedurally generated which makes for a tense and unpredictable challenge. The success of titles like *WOLF* obviously rests on the strength of the 3D effect and here it works really well. Contrasting colours and bold lines are used to create depth and the view rarely gets muddy. The speed is decent, running at perhaps 75% of what most would call optimal, but that shouldn't deter you from checking this out. </BODY>

SCORE: 85%

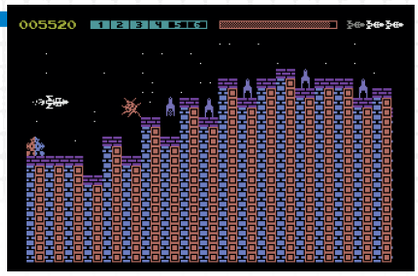
<!--- [GAME BOY COLOR] WOLF INCLUDES A STRAFE BUTTON WHICH COMES IN HANDY WHEN ENGAGING ENEMIES. --->

NEW GAMES NEEDED

Our new email address is waiting for all your homebrew news, previews and more: **retrogamer@futurenet.com**

THE HOMEBREWER'S KIT

<!--- [PLUS/4] THE GAME FEATURES AN EXCELLENT TITLE SCREEN THAT SHOWS OFF THE PLUS/4'S EXPANDED PALETTE. --->



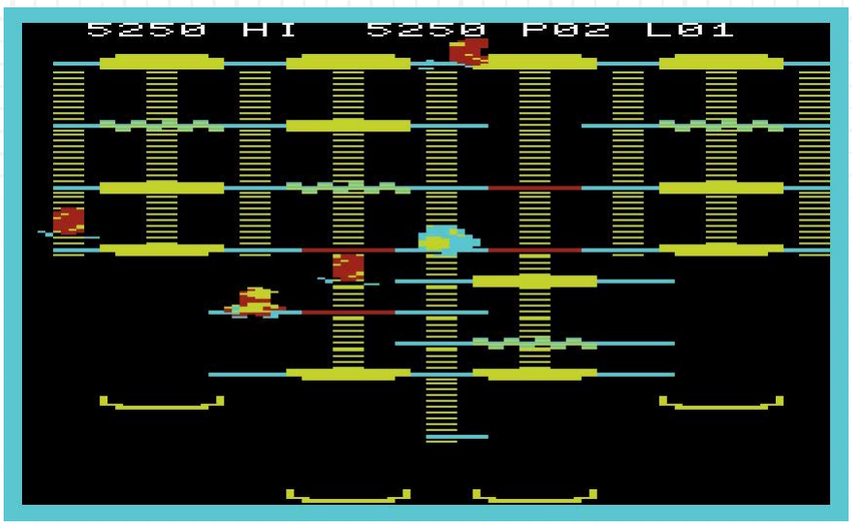
<!--- [PLUS/4] THIS IS CLASSIC ARCADE SCRAMBLE. PLAYING THIS WILL TRANSPORT YOU TO 1981 WHEN THE COIN-OP CAME OUT. --->

SCRAMBLE

<INFO FORMAT: COMMODORE PLUS/4 CREDITS: EPY (CODE), CSABO (MUSIC), UNREAL (TITLE IMAGE) PRICE: FREE DIGITAL DOWNLOAD WEB: BIT.LY/SCRAMBLE-PLUS4 />

<BODY> **There's a written law that every retro computer must have multiple versions of Konami's *Scramble*, official or otherwise, and the Plus/4 is no exception.** Do we really need another? If it's as good as this then yes, absolutely. This conversion is spot-on, from the graphics, to the stage layouts, to the (frankly annoying after a while) sound. The scrolling is smooth and the Plus/4's palette is put to good use throughout, recreating the coin-op's vibrant colours. There are a few options to play with, including one to control the game using a SNES gamepad. Our only niggle is that the collision detection is a little sensitive, which can be a problem when negotiating the tight confines of the enemy base. </BODY>

SCORE: 88%



BURGER TIME

<!--- [VIC-20] THE CHANGING LAYOUT OF LATER STAGES COMPLICATES BURGER CONSTRUCTION, SO KEEP THAT IN MIND. --->

<INFO FORMAT: COMMODORE VIC-20 CREDITS: BEAMRIDER (CODE), ROBERT HURST (API) PRICE: FREE DIGITAL DOWNLOAD WEB: BIT.LY/BURGERTIME-VIC20 />

<BODY> **Data East's 1982 arcade smash *Burger Time* comes to the VIC in a polished port.** The graphics are characteristically large and chunky, and the screen is laid out in such a way that it never gets too messy. Controls are responsive and overall it's easier than the coin-op, allowing you to progress without too much trouble. The game requires 35K to run due to its use of pre-cached sprites, which could be a challenge if running on original hardware. We recommend giving it a spin in an emulator. </BODY>

SCORE: 79%

PROCESSING

<INTRO> RENATO THIAGO BOCALINI IS CURRENTLY CONVERTING DATA EAST'S ROBOCOP COIN-OP TO THE SEGA MEGA DRIVE </INTRO>

<BODY> **Having explored the possibilities of Mega Drive development, Renato looked for a suitable game to port.** "The first one that came to my mind was *RoboCop*," he tells us. "*RoboCop* is one of those arcade games I always thought deserved a Mega Drive conversion. I would have loved to play that as a kid. In April 2026 I saw the opportunity to create something solo in my spare time, in weeks or months, rather than years. When I first got RoboCop walking and shooting on the screen I thought, 'OK, maybe I can actually do this.'"

Renato has released a demo of the first level, featuring music by Luke McQueen. "With the first demo out, I'm currently working on the next levels. Luke has already sent me the next tune, which sounds incredible again. My goal isn't just to complete all the stages. I want to keep polishing the game until it feels like a real Mega Drive arcade conversion from that period, the kind of port we could actually have received back then." </BODY>

<!--- [MEGA DRIVE] RENATO IS AIMING FOR ACCURACY IN HIS CONVERSION. "I'M REDRAWING AND ADAPTING THE ARCADE GRAPHICS BY HAND WHILE TRYING TO STAY AS CLOSE AS POSSIBLE TO THE ORIGINAL." --->

HOT TOPIC

RETROBATES MULL OVER THE SCENE'S MOST INTRIGUING ISSUES

METAL GEAR MEMORIES

The team grabs a Narc Soda and talks Solid Snake

DARRAN JONES

MARTYN CARROLL

TIM EMPEY

The recent release of *Metal Gear Solid: Master Collection Vol 2* (reviewed last issue) prompted this month's Ultimate Guide to *Metal Gear Solid 4,* which in turn triggered lots of conversations around the *Metal Gear* series and our favourite entries.

MARTYN

So what was your first experience with the *Metal Gear* series? Was it *Metal Gear Solid*, or one of the earlier NES or MSX games?

DARRAN

I want to be cool and say that I played the games from the very beginning, but it was *MGS*.

TIM

For me it was not playing *MGS* while my friends bashed through it. I was working in an off-licence and my friends hired it out. By the time I got back, they were about half-way through. So the first time I really got to play through it was when I reviewed *Twin Snakes* for *Cube* magazine.

DARRAN

Ah, when Snake got stuck in the Matrix. Did you start with the earlier games, Mart?

MARTYN

No. I got caught up in the *MGS* hype. I was reading *CVG* at the time, which was championing new games that were coming out in Japan, like *Final Fantasy VII*. So *MGS* was previewed for months, and I got it as soon as it came out. I really liked it, sneaking around in cardboard boxes and all that, but if I'm honest I probably spent more time on the *Silent Hill* demo that came bundled with it.

DARRAN

They were good at that. As the *Metal Gear Solid 2* demo came with a game as well, *Zone Of The Enders*. I was genuinely blown by *MGS*, it felt like a movie and I got absolutely sucked into it, even though I'm not a huge fan of stealth games.

» [PlayStation 3] Old Snake takes aim in *MGS4*, one of the more divisive entries in the *Metal Gear* series.

MARTYN

Wasn't there a VR Missions disc as well? I spent a bit of time on that, but that was pretty much the last *MGS* I properly played.

DARRAN

Yes, they did revisions for a lot of the games if I recall. Who remembers the insane hype around *MGS2*?

TIM

I wasn't actually that hyped about it before I got my hands on it, but once I started *MGS2* I didn't put it down for ages. Multiple playthroughs, I really enjoyed it, especially sticking people up and nabbing all of their dogtags.

MARTYN

I do recall the pre-release hype. That was one of the games I helped write a walkthrough for, and I think that slog probably killed it for me. We imported a US copy of the game so we could write the guide before the PAL release. The sub-editor at the time changed all mentions of

» [PlayStation 2] A lot of fans were disappointed that you spent so much of *MGS2* controlling Raiden rather than Solid Snake.

» [PlayStation 2] EVA takes Big Boss for a ride in the highly-regarded *Snake Eater*.

» [PSP] Darran counts the portable entry *Peace Walker* as one of his favourite *Metal Gear* games.

» [PlayStation 2] Snake sneaks around the Discovery in the opening to MGS2, trying to avoid alerting the guards.

'Solidus Snake' to 'Solid Snake', as if it was a typo. That was funny (although not at the time).

DARRAN

I remember my cousin bringing it around on New Year's Eve/Day (I think) as it had just turned up at our local import shop (which was closed) and he got his copy early as he knew the owner well. Blowing out the individual bottles felt astonishing. Did everyone get on with Raiden?

TIM

Not having played much of Snake's adventure, and just his intro bit in *MGS2*, I was fine with Raiden. I really didn't get the hate. Plus he's amazing in *Rising: Revengeance*. However, I can't express how much I enjoyed *MGS3*, I was so blown away by the end of it. Did you two play it? I kind of want to get *Delta*, but am worried it'll ruin my memories.

MARTYN

I recall my old colleague Aaron Birch, who used to write for **RG**, absolutely loved *MGS3*, wouldn't stop talking about it. I think I need to watch the ending on YouTube and spoil it for myself.

> "Peace Walker and Metal Gear Acid 2 remain the best games in the series"
> DARRAN JONES

DARRAN

I really liked the 3DS version of *Snake Eater*, but I bounced off the fourth game originally due to the ponderously long cutscenes. I really enjoyed revisiting it on the new compilation. *Peace Walker* and *Metal Gear Acid 2* remain the best games in the series for me though.

TIM

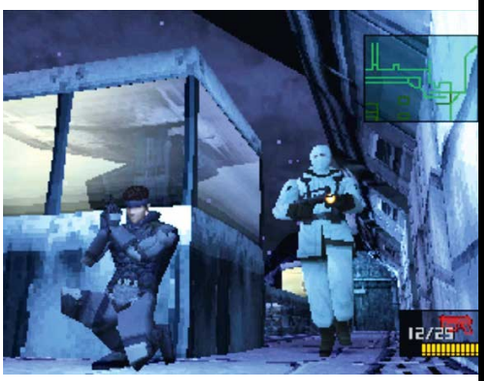
I played *MGS4* very briefly, just the start of it, but Will from *Play* took it home to the flat we were sharing so I got to see a lot of it. Though I did sod off when some of the cutscenes kicked in. And then I'd come back and they were still going on!

MARTYN

You see, there you go. Wasn't there something like nine hours of cutscenes in total? That's like watching *The Lord Of The Rings* trilogy.

DARRAN

But not as good. (Sorry, Hideo.) ✱



» [PlayStation] *Metal Gear Solid* was not the first game in the series, but it's the one that turned it into a global mega franchise.

» [PlayStation] *MGS* featured full 3D environments, but sometimes harked back to the series' top-down 2D roots.

READERS REACT

We asked for your own Metal Gear memories

Andrew O
Having to look on the back of the case for Meryl's Codec frequency was such a cool moment. It's overshadowed by the Psycho Mantis fight's memory card reading, but the actual physicality of having to look at something outside of the game to progress was new to me.

Martin Roberts
Psycho Mantis fight. Him reading the memory card and then realising you have to swap joypad ports. Ground-breaking.

dimitris tsianakas
To catch the flu, start sneezing, and have the guards hear me on *MGS2*.

Antony
Climbing the massive ladder in *Snake Eater*. When the music hits, gives me goosebumps every single time.

Dutch
MGS4. Snake crawling through the giant microwave. First time I played it I'm mashing the button and I actually stand up and start yelling, "Come on Snake, me old son, you can do it!"

Aaron Weiss
The guard with diarrhoea.

RetroMartin
Playing the *MGS* demo and seeing how cinematic it was. Everything voiced. Big cutscenes. Nice open areas to sneak through multiple ways. Perfection.

Erik Kelly
In *MGS3*'s epilogue, Snake listens to a tape recording where EVA reveals that her orders were to kill him. As he sits in the chair and takes in this information, we see an imagined shot of her pointing a gun at him while he was sleeping. It's my favourite single visual in any videogame.

Mama Maji
Bawling my eyes out at the debriefing of *MGS3*.

Robert August de Meijer
First time trying to conquer a town in *MGS5*. Additional troops kept coming, sky went dark, I kept messing up over and over again. Until I learned their behaviour, their weapons, their communication... now I was the hunter.

adumbperson
Fighting The End in *MGS3*.

COLLECTOR'S CORNER

READERS TAKE US THROUGH **THE RETRO KEYHOLE**

PSYCHONAUTS

"As a big fan of Tim Schafer, I was very excited when *Psychonauts* came out and I ordered a signed PC box from Double Fine."

AMOUNT PAID: €50

L'AFFAIRE MORLOV

"A decent adventure game for the CD-i, released around the time the console was discontinued. One of the few games that combines my passion for CD-i with adventure games."

AMOUNT PAID: €30

THE CD-I COLLECTOR

Jaap Jansen's collection focusses on Philips CD-i games and big box PC adventures

Words by Martyn Carroll

BIO

NAME:
Jaap Jansen

LOCATION:
Cadier en Keer, Netherlands

ESTIMATED VALUE OF COLLECTION:
€10,000

FAVOURITE SYSTEM:
Philips CD-i

FAVOURITE GAME:
The Curse Of Monkey Island (PC) and Burn Cycle (CD-i)

SOCIAL MEDIA (X):
@jansenjfa

Jaap Jansen's love for the Philips CD-i stems from his father's job. "My dad used to work for Philips," he begins, "and in the early Nineties they introduced the CD-i, which was heavily advertised. When I wanted to buy a console, it was a logical step for me to buy a CD-i, rather than a SNES (which would have been half the price). It is a system that's very dear to me."

He reveals that the CD-i sold quite well in its Dutch homeland, so it wasn't too tricky to track down most of the key titles. "The expensive games include the Nintendo-licensed *Hotel Mario, Link: The Faces Of Evil, Zelda: The Wand Of Gamelon* and *Zelda's Adventure*. Philips made a deal with Nintendo to release these 'questionable' games. *Zelda's Adventure* is in demand as it only had a European release and it's an official *Zelda* – though it's not great. For the Dutch market, most games were dubbed, which is usually not that great. Hence, I'm currently trying to find the English releases of some games, but those are not cheap! These days I prefer to check out the European websites such as Vinted and Tradera, as eBay and the Dutch auction site Marktplaats are way overpriced."

Jaap is also a fan of PC adventure games, particularly the *Monkey Island* series. "I have vivid memories of playing *Monkey Island 2: LeChuck's Revenge* at a friend's house who had a better PC than we did. As a point-and-click adventure lover, I had tremendous fun playing this witty game and was sold. Humour in games is not easy to pull off, but *Monkey Island* does it perfectly. When *The Curse Of Monkey Island* came out in 1997, we had upgraded our PC, so I bought it at release. And from then, I've played all of the games in the series, which had a great original run at LucasArts, later at Telltale and more recently by Ron Gilbert's Terrible Toybox."

Outside of actual games, Jaap has racks full of gaming magazines – and he's always adding more. "Reading about my favourite games in magazines gives me tremendous nostalgic joy. And it is time efficient. I simply don't have time any more to play all my favourite games, but I do have time to read. I focus in general on magazines from the eras my favourite games came out: adventure games (Eighties and Nineties), CD-i (Nineties) and Nintendo (Nineties and Noughties). Regarding the language of the magazines, I now have every issue I want from the various magazines in Dutch, but I'm trying to expand my UK magazine collection. I do understand a little bit of French, so I recently also started to collect *Génération 4*."

Is there anything else he's looking to add to his collection? "Game-wise, not really," he says. "I know the Philips CD-i has a finite number of titles, but I have no desire to get all those mostly mediocre discs. There are still a few big box Sierra and LucasArts titles I'm looking for. I'm currently on the search to complete my *PC Zone* and *PC Gamer* magazine collection, which I just started, so it is far from complete. Also, I'm slowly building my **Retro Gamer** collection." ✱

Got an impressive collection of your own? Contact us at:

RetroGamerUK @RetroGamer_Mag retrogamer@futurenet.com retrogamermag.bsky.social

TALES OF MONKEY ISLAND DELUXE EDITION

"I was very excited when Telltale Games licensed *Monkey Island* and I bought their digital episodes right away. This box was available as an extra add-on."

AMOUNT PAID: €22

TIEN ADVENTURES

"All the great adventure games from LucasArts with a nice Dutch magazine. Back then, I just wanted to play these games legally, and this was a great way to achieve that."

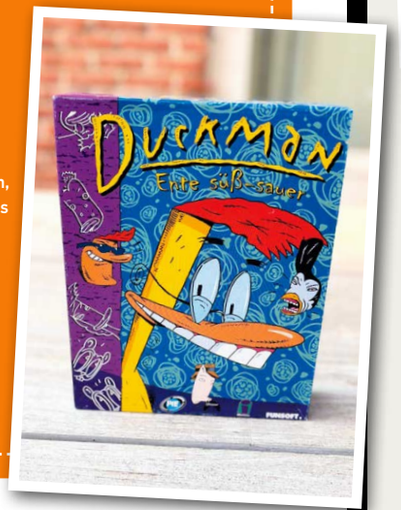
AMOUNT PAID: €40

JEWEL IN THE CROWN

DUCKMAN

■ "As a big fan of the cartoon, I was very glad to pick up this PC game. It is the German release but the game is in English. It is quite an enjoyable adventure game, although unfortunately Jason Alexander did not do the voice-over."

PAID: €40



BARGAIN HUNT

Your guide to the rising world of retro prices

THE COVER STAR

AMIGA 1200

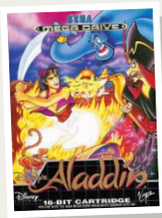
RGL's THEA1200 looks like excellent value for money at **£169** compared to the original hardware, with used prices for a standard model currently starting at around **£400.**

ICO (PLAYSTATION 2)

Expect to pay **£20-25** for this wonderful game, with the *Limited Edition* set complete with art carts fetching double that.

METAL GEAR SOLID 4 (PLAYSTATION 3)

The fourth game in the series certainly won't break the bank. You can grab *Guns Of The Patriots* for **£5** or less.



DISNEY'S ALADDIN (MEGA DRIVE)

You won't need to use up a wish to acquire this Disney game. It goes for **£12** complete with manual, and half that for just the cart.

STAR WARS EPISODE I: RACER (NINTENDO 64)

Expect to pay around **£8-10** for the cart, and double that for a CIB example in decent condition. A sealed copy recently sold for an impressive **£271.**

STAR WARS RACER REVENGE (PLAYSTATION 2)

You can snap this up complete for around a tenner. Much more coveted is the PS4 version published by Limited Run Games, which goes for north of **£100.**

NINTENDO POWER MAGAZINE

Want to grab the first issue from 1988, complete with poster and inserts? For a copy in good nick you'll be looking at **£150-200.** For a mint copy it might be three to four times that amount.

VAMPIRE SAVIOR (SATURN)

The Japanese-only Saturn version goes for around **£40-50.** Just make sure it comes with the required 4MB RAM expansion cartridge.

HERO OF THE GOLDEN TALISMAN (C64)

This game cost **£2.99** on release in 1985 and you can pick it up these days for not much more. That's the kind of inflation we like.

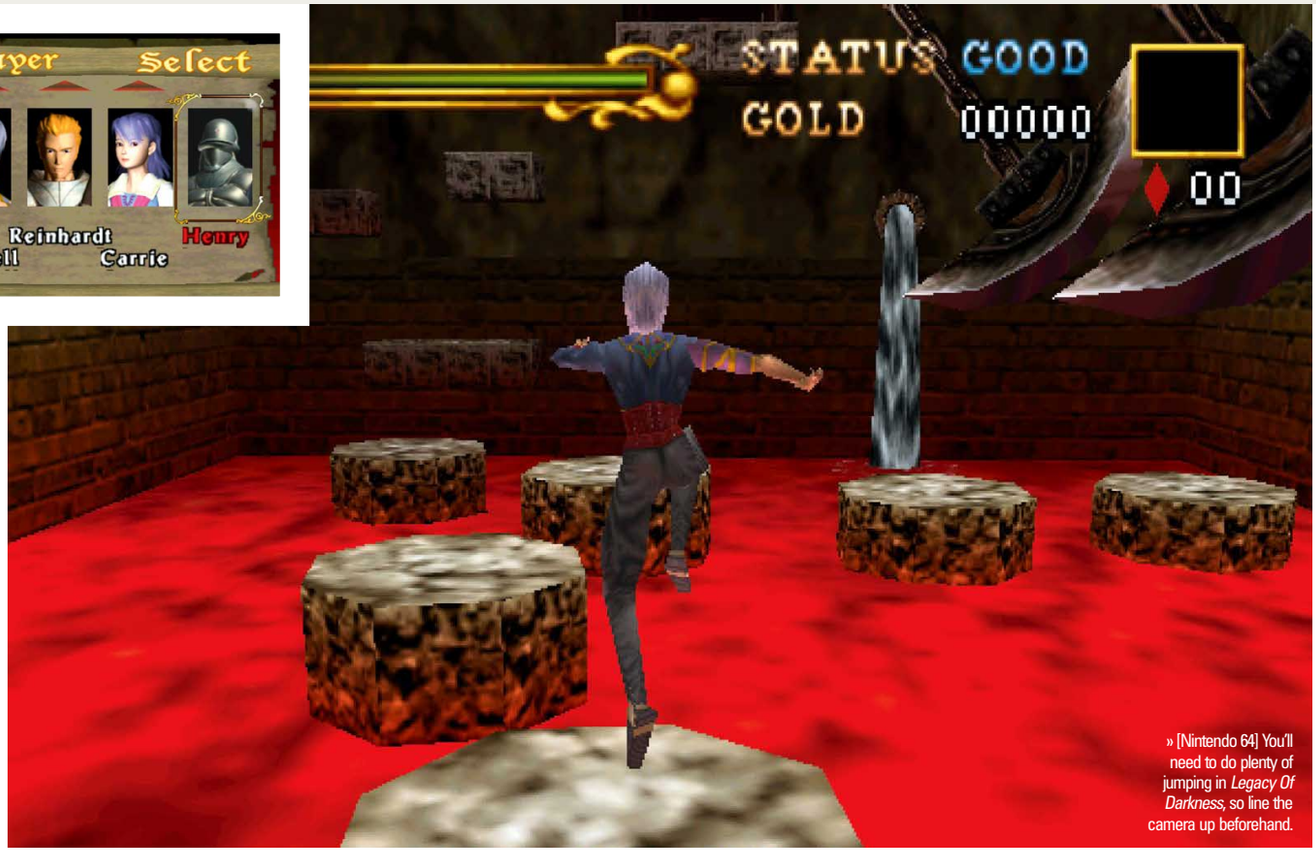
HOW MUCH?!

THE LEGEND OF ZELDA: OCARINA OF TIME (NINTENDO 64)

Interest in all things *Ocarina* is building ahead of the remake's launch. A sealed PAL copy sold online for a princely **£2,862.** That's a lot of Rupees!

Prices correct at time of print

» [Nintendo 64] Cartridge restrictions mean Carrie and Reinhardt's adventures aren't identical to the ones that appeared in the original *Castlevania*.



» [Nintendo 64] You'll need to do plenty of jumping in *Legacy Of Darkness*, so line the camera up beforehand.

CASTLEVANIA: LEGACY OF DARKNESS

Released to a muted reception in 1999, Konami's second Castlevania game for the Nintendo 64 now commands a rather frightening price, particularly for the US variant. Should you track it down or simply stick a stake in it?

Words by Darran Jones

IN THE KNOW

- **» PUBLISHER:** KONAMI
- **» DEVELOPER:** KONAMI COMPUTER ENTERTAINMENT KOBE
- **» PLATFORM:** NINTENDO 64
- **» RELEASED:** 1999
- **» PRICE TODAY:** £210+

» While a complete PAL edition is around £250 the US edition is typically double that once postage and custom charges have been added.

THE GAME

They say good things come to those who wait and that proved particularly true with Konami's second *Castlevania* game for the N64. Best of all, the wait wasn't very long at all as it debuted less than 11 months after the first game, which couldn't have pleased early adopters.

Legacy Of Darkness is an odd release, for while it serves as a prequel to the earlier N64 game, it often reuses many of the levels that you first explored as either Reinhardt Schneider or Carrie Fernandez. They'll typically be played in a novel new fashion, but it does mean that *Legacy Of Darkness* feels overly familiar to anyone who played the first N64 adventure.

This time around you play as Cornell, a Man-beast who is trying to save his sister Ada from the clutches of Dracula. While we've mentioned that his quest does cover a lot of old ground, there are enough new areas and boss fights to make it feel like a new experience if you're an old hand with the original adventure.

The biggest benefit that *Legacy Of Darkness* offers over *Castlevania* is that it's a far stronger quest than the studio's first attempt, thanks to a better camera, a smoother framerate (providing you don't play the Hi-Res version) and much more content, including a modified version of Reinhardt and Carrie's quests from *Castlevania* and a brand-new adventure featuring a gun-wielding knight called Henry who has seven days to track down six missing kids.

THE QUALITY

Lukewarm is perhaps best to describe *Legacy Of Darkness*' reception when it was reviewed by critics. *Next Generation* magazine was not impressed with Konami's effort, with reviewer Blake Fischer stating in their 2/5 review, "In the dry opening months of 2000, this game might be worth

» [Nintendo 64] You'll need to complete the game before you can access Henry, but he's worth the wait.

a look, but it falls far short of its own legacy. *Legacy Of Mediocrity* is more like it, at least in 3D." Konami's game did little to impress IGN either, with the popular online website stating, "*Castlevania 64* was already a tad outdated when it arrived last year. *Legacy Of Darkness*, bringing almost nothing new to the table, is downright ancient." That was good for a final score of 6.8/10.

The game received similarly weak scores in the UK, with one of the best coming from *N64 Magazine*, which had been a big fan of the original Nintendo 64 game. In a 75% review, Jes Bickham felt that, "Ultimately, as a 3D adventure, *Castlevania: Legacy Of Darkness* is looking a little dog-eared."

WHY IT'S EXPENSIVE

The reception from the press meant there was little buzz around *Legacy Of Darkness* when it launched. The argument from many reviewers that it was little more than an update of the original game would have added to the general apathy around its release and that disinterest now translates to a high price on the secondary market. A low print run will add to that scarcity as well. Retrospectively, the game's reception today is a lot kinder than those earlier reviews were, and there certainly appears to be a lot more affection for both *Legacy Of Darkness* and its predecessor online, even if they still highlight that the games are far from perfect. That stronger reception has meant that both games have started to climb in price, as more people start to reevaluate Konami's undeniably flawed, but genuinely interesting adventures.

CHEAPER ALTERNATIVES

When it comes to 3D *Castlevanias* you'll find your wallet continually tested. Both *Castlevania* and *Castlevania: Curse Of Darkness* have surged in price on the PlayStation 2 in recent years, with the Xbox version of the latter now selling for close to £150. In fact, the only 3D *Castlevania* game that won't break the bank nowadays is *Lords Of Shadow* and its sequel. Both titles are readily available for under £20 and while the original is great, the sequel is best ignored. If you fancy games from a similar era, both *MediEvil 1* and *2* are

» [Nintendo 64] Cornell's range is surprisingly decent so he's able to take on multiple opponents with ease.

good fun and won't cost a fortune, while *Shadow Man* on the N64 is also an option. All three games can be found for under £30. Alternatively, there are solid modern-day remasters of *Shadow Man*, *Legacy Of Kain: Defiance* and *Soul Reaver* to consider.

THE BOTTOM LINE

While the 2D *Castlevanias* are easily available today, we can't see that happening with the 3D games any time soon. If you don't mind missing out on the story, the Japanese version of *Legacy Of Darkness* is a far cheaper alternative and perfectly playable. While not as bad as originally suggested the fiddly controls and camera will still be too much for some. However, it continues to climb in price, so if you are a big fan of the series and have always wanted to own it, you may not want to wait. ✱

I'VE GOT IT!

These lucky readers sunk their teeth into Konami's game

Shiryu
I own the CIB PAL version and I'm sure some people will hate me for this: it cost me €0 back in 1999 because it was a hand-me-down from one of my friends who did reviews for a videogame magazine. He knew I was a fan of the first outing so he gave the game to a good home: mine!

Matt
I picked up the Japanese one (imported directly) for around £40 about 7-8 years back.

Adam Sadler
I bought it from a brilliant independent shop in Lakeside Shopping Centre, Essex (in which I ended up working as my first job) called Thatz Entertainment. Off the top of my head, it would have been something like £24.99 at the time – so waaay less!

N64 Magazine Quotes
I imported the Japanese version via eBay in 2017 for £55. At the time that felt expensive (about 75 quid in today's money), but good condition boxed copies were getting tricky to find even then, so I went for it.

DANMAKUMAN
Some years ago one of my friends had it, he didn't play it too much. I asked him if I could take it... for free, I wasn't joking at all and while he thought about it for a minute he said, "Yeah, take it," and a red Game Boy Pocket as well. Just like that!

Lars Schade
TBH: I don't really know. I think I bought it some days after release for – I think – 149 DM.

MY RETRO LIFE

PERSONAL STORIES ABOUT OUR **SHARED PASSION**

30 YEARS OF LARA

Martyn visits the Tomb Raider exhibition in Derby

Did you read Darran's chat with Luke Earle in the news pages of RG 289? Luke is a massive *Tomb Raider* fan and he's put together an exhibition in Derby, the city where Core Design was based, to celebrate the series' 30th anniversary. This struck a cord with me for two reasons. The first is that I've always been a massive *Tomb Raider* fan, stretching back to when the original game was released. I was a student in 1996, with far too much time on my hands, and I fell in love with the game's mix of exploration, action, platforming and puzzle-solving. Lara was pretty cool too, right?

The other reason is that I actually used to work in Derby. Between 2005 and 2009, I was based at the local newspaper, the *Derby Telegraph*. The paper revelled in the fact that the city, a pioneering industrial powerhouse, was now the birthplace of one of the world's most popular videogame characters. Let's not forget that the first five *Tomb Raider* titles, released between 1996 and 2000, racked up global sales of more than 28 million. And on the back of that, Lara became a pop culture icon; the original 'cyberbabe' (ugh). I remember going to see U2's *PopMart* tour and she appeared on a 50-metre-wide screen, firing her twin pistols. She also broke ground by gracing the cover of *The Face* magazine.

The exhibition provided the perfect excuse to revisit my old haunt. Fellow **RG** writer Paul Drury lives nearby in Nottingham, so we arranged to meet up and do a bit of digging into the history of the series. The exhibition is compact, spread over three rooms of Pickford's House, a museum based in an old Georgian townhouse. It's not Croft Manor, but it is a fitting place to study relics relating to the series. The bulk of the good stuff can be found in the first room, including an early *Tomb Raider* game design document (dated December 1994) and the actual PC that programmer Derek Leigh-Gilchrist used to write code for the first five games. There's loads of Lara stuff, naturally, including that issue of *The Face* and several life-size models used for various marketing activities. I spotted some promotional Lucozade (Larazade) and even *Tomb Raider III*-themed champagne. I also discovered that Core Design's original office was based a stone's throw away, at 55 Ashbourne Road, an address I must have driven past at least a thousand times without even realising.

The second room is focussed on the wider *Tomb Raider* franchise, specifically the movies starring Angelina Jolie as Lara. In the final room you can take a seat and play the original game on either the PlayStation or Saturn (which all fact fans know was where the game made its worldwide debut, a few weeks before the PlayStation and PC versions). People often comment that they'd love to experience their favourite games for the first time, to recapture the feelings once again. I find as you grow older you don't have to wish for that; it happens by default. I rinsed the original *Tomb Raider* 30 years ago, but picking up the pad now, nothing looked familiar. I was exploring tombs with the same sense of wonder I experienced in 1996. It's a very special game, and while the sequels build on the original (and up the ante in terms of action and cinematic setpieces), I love the original's quiet ambience. It really does feel like you're deep underground, far from civilisation.

The same can't be said about the exhibition. We arrived just after it opened and for a while we were the only ones there. But pretty soon the three rooms were full of people, including a lot of children (it was a weekday during the school holidays). As I was playing, a volunteer at the museum told me that the exhibition had been very popular, attracting people of all ages, and the numbers through the door had surprised them. That was my cue to put down the pad and let some of these youngsters have a go. "What do I do?" one of them asked, as Lara was attacked by a plague of bats. "Press Triangle to draw your guns, hold X to fire, then push Square and down to somersault backwards." It was slowly coming back to me.

The exhibition runs until 28 November 2026. Find out more at bit.ly/lara_museum *

> "I was exploring tombs with the same sense of wonder I experienced in 1996"
> **MARTYN CARROLL**

CROFT CLASSICS

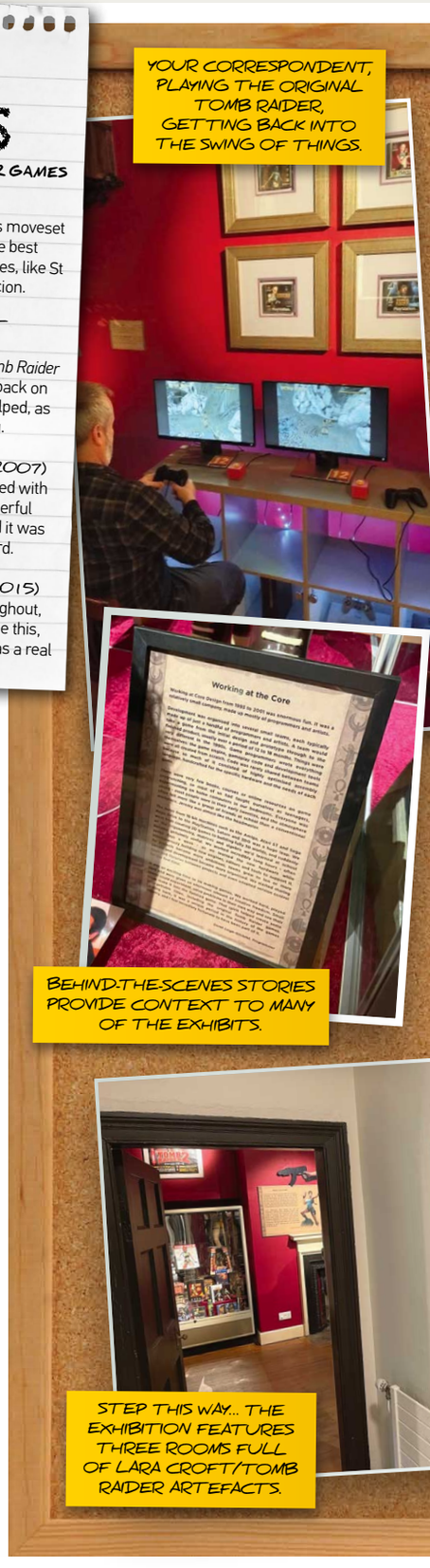
MY PICK OF THE TOP TOMB RAIDER GAMES

TOMB RAIDER (1996)
It's a bit rough around the edges, and Lara's moveset is limited, but for me the original has the best atmosphere and the most memorable stages, like St Francis' Folly and Sanctuary Of The Scion.

TOMB RAIDER: THE LAST REVELATION (1999)
I felt that the series lost its way a little in *Tomb Raider III*, but the fourth game steered the series back on track. A return to actually raiding tombs helped, as did the introduction of rope swinging.

TOMB RAIDER: ANNIVERSARY (2007)
New custodians Crystal Dynamics impressed with *Tomb Raider: Legend*, but it was this wonderful reinvention of the original game that proved it was the right team to take the series forward.

RISE OF THE TOMB RAIDER (2015)
The so-called 'Survival' trilogy is solid throughout, but if I had to choose my favourite it would be this, the middle entry. It's the most polished and has a real cinematic feel.


YOUR CORRESPONDENT, PLAYING THE ORIGINAL TOMB RAIDER, GETTING BACK INTO THE SWING OF THINGS.
Working at the Core
BEHIND-THE-SCENES STORIES PROVIDE CONTEXT TO MANY OF THE EXHIBITS.
STEP THIS WAY... THE EXHIBITION FEATURES THREE ROOMS FULL OF LARA CROFT/TOMB RAIDER ARTEFACTS.

HERE'S THE VERY UNASSUMING PC THAT CORE PROGRAMMER DEREK LEIGH-GILCHRIST USED TO DEVELOP THE TOMB RAIDER GAMES.
DID YOU REMEMBER THAT TOMB RAIDER WAS RELEASED FOR THE NOKIA N-GAGE HANDHELD? THAT AND MANY MORE VERSIONS ARE COLLECTED HERE.
THIS CENTRAL CASE FEATURES A RECRUITMENT AD THAT CORE PUBLISHED IN EMPIRE MAGAZINE IN 1995, LOOKING FOR A "TALENTED SCREENPLAY WRITER" TO WORK ON "CUTTING EDGE VIDEOGAME PROJECTS".
LARA CROFT
PICKFORDS' HOUSE
EXHIBITION NOW SHOWING
LARA CROFT: 30 YEARS ON
THE FREE-TO-VISIT EXHIBITION OPENED IN JULY AND IS RUNNING UNTIL THE END OF NOVEMBER.
RG WRITER AND LOCAL BOY PAUL DRURY, PICTURED BY THE DISPLAY ON LARA CROFT COSPLAY.

READERS REACT

Our Bluesky followers share their favourite Tomb Raider games

MYST & Co.
I've always had a soft spot for *The Last Revelation* – it's the one I have the most vivid memories of playing as a child, and the one that evokes the most nostalgia for me. It's also the first game that I ever tried speedrunning in, before I even knew what speedrunning was!

JLSoryu
For me, you still can't beat the originals, still as much in love with *Tomb Raider II* now as I was when I first played it as a kid!

Robb from 8/16/32bit
Honesty, the 2013 version for me. Far more refined than the originals thanks to better technology and more story depth (even if it was still fairly shallow).

Statos
The original then *Underworld*. It's about isolation and exploration. The new games try too hard to get the cinematics, complex stories and all the other trendy stuff in.

Robert August de Meijer
Underworld has the best gameplay. A low bar, but it's the only one I could barely manage to enjoy.

FatPlumber
My first *Tomb Raider* game was *Legend* on Xbox 360. Loved it, played it countless times and is easily a favourite. Also, Keeley Hawes is the best Lara voice.

mothcub
I have a soft spot for *Angel Of Darkness* because I had a cheat disc that could make Lara levitate and jump far across levels and out of bounds. Plus I loved the weird, sinister, sparse Paris. A beautifully creepy game.

Cherry Lambrini
The original is my favourite. They really captured a sense of awe and wonder with the exploration that they haven't quite managed to replicate since. *TRII* holds a special place for me as that was my first experience, getting the game for my 14th birthday, but nothing beats the original adventure.

Mama Maji
I just love Lara, that's really all I got to say about it.

MAILBAG

HAVE YOUR SAY... SEND US A LETTER OR MAKE YOURSELF HEARD ON SOCIAL MEDIA – **TWITTER.COM/RETROGAMER_MAG**

WIN!

Every month, one lucky writer-in will receive a copy of one of our classic retro books from our archives. Good luck everyone!

» Will we ever get an eighth *Police Academy* movie? Let's hope not, the slide was pretty bad.

STAR LETTER

BATTLE OF THE BITS

Hi **Retro Gamer**,
I've been a reader since the very beginning and a subscriber for most of that time. The magazine just seems to get better and better, although I'm a few issues behind on my reading!

One feature that particularly stands out is Music Memories and the memories it stirs in my gaming past. The article on *Monty On The Run* most definitely did that. I love the SID sound, but as an Amstrad CPC owner you could sometimes feel like a second-class citizen. Not so with this Rob Hubbard tune. It really shone on the Amstrad. Which got me thinking: what about adding a Conversion Capers element to the article? How did other platforms sound in comparison to the main featured platform? Or did they do something different?

Keep up the great work!
Jon Woodley

That is a great idea and it's not something we considered, Jon. It probably wouldn't work for the PlayStation era onwards, but we'll definitely start considering it for the 8-bit and 16-bit systems. That grand idea has just won you a book.

» [Amstrad CPC] It's rightly famed on the C64 for its astonishing Rob Hubbard track, but the CPC rendition is pretty good too.

MOVIE MAGIC

Hey **Retro Gamer**,
Martyn's reference to *Police Academy 7: Mission To Moscow* in his *Soulcalibur II* feature (issue 289) really made me chuckle. And it reminded me that we don't just share memories of classic videogames, but (ahem) 'classic' movies too.

I'd love to see a feature on games based on movies, particularly the cult films of the Eighties. A quick search tells me that a planned *Police Academy* videogame never saw the light of day, but there are loads of others I'd love to read about. *Short Circuit*, *Gremlins*, *The Goonies*, *Predator*... I'll bet there's some really obscure ones out there too.

'I'll be back' to check out later issues with my fingers crossed.
All the best,
Tim F

Worry not, Tim. Martyn agrees with you and he's going to put something together for a future issue. Like Santa, he's already started making his list and checking it twice.

SECRET PASTS

Hi, **Retro Gamer**,
Firstly, thanks for the consistently excellent magazine! I'm sending this in because I thought it was pretty cool. I'm a big fan of the nerdy pop-punk band Nerf Herder, best known for doing the theme tune for *Buffy The Vampire Slayer*, but they also have a great catalogue of albums (with several gaming references within songs). Their lead singer is Parry Gripp who has become renowned for releasing hundreds of novelty songs on YouTube over the past couple of decades, gaining a significant following.

I've been fortunate enough to see the band live a few times (if they come to a venue near you, I recommend seeing them), and most recently saw them perform in San Francisco. After the show I had a chat with the band and noticed that the guitarist, Linus Dotson has a couple of Commodore 64 tattoos – it turns out he's a big fan of the system. Even more impressive though, he shared that Parry had made a C64 game when at high school called *Laser Strike*. Parry was a little embarrassed by it, but he also mentioned that he'd originally made a game for the Commodore PET.

I did a bit of research later, assuming the game was probably just a bit of home fun, but it turns out that it actually got published and was available in Europe. The earlier Commodore PET game was

» [C64] Does anyone else know of celebrities like Parry Gripp who made videogames before they became famous? Write in and let us know.

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called *Attack!* but I could only find limited details about that release.

Laser Strike is a little rough and won't have won any awards, but it's definitely playable with a bit of practice. Not bad for a kid at the age of just 15!

This also made me wonder – what other celebrities might have produced bedroom-coded videogames before they found fame in other fields?

All the best,
Mark Potter

That's a really interesting story Mark, thanks for sharing. We know that Timothée Chalamet used to sell customised Xbox pads before he hit the big time and that Henry Cavill loves his games, but we're unaware of anyone else who might have made some. We'll start digging.

A GAMING SUGGESTION

Hi **Retro Gamer** team,
I noticed your review of *Mina The Hollower* in 287, and it got me thinking about another game that would fit Retro RoundUp: *Pseudoregalia* by rittzler.

It's a shame you likely missed its release back in 2023, but I feel it's very deserving of a look. It's a PS1-inspired 3D Metroidvania with nonlinear exploration and very fluid movement. The whole castle is built around that movement, so you keep finding shortcuts and routes that were clearly left there for players who experiment, and the low-poly visuals are done with real care for the era rather than as a gimmick. It's also short (three to five hours) and cheap, which makes it an easy one to recommend.

Plus, I believe there's a timely hook. Sybil, the main character, has just been announced as a guest fighter in *Shot One Fighters*, the upcoming roguelite fighting game. I think this will result in some new attention.
Alexis Westmoreland

» [PC] Darran loves Metroidvanias, so he'll certainly be checking out *Pseudoregalia*.

Thanks for the recommendation Alexis, we'll be sure to take a look at it.

COMPLETED IT, MATE

Dear **Retro Gamer**,
What a joy it was to see *The Great Escape* on the Endgame section of **Retro Gamer** magazine. This was a game I enjoyed playing on the C64 but was never able to escape the camp so did not witness the final screen. Please keep up the good work on the Endgame feature to give players of dubious gaming skill, such as myself, the opportunity to see what the true masters achieve!

DISCUSSED THIS MONTH

Keep on running

Confusion has been on the menu this month due to two films: *The Runner* and *Runner* being released at the same time. *The Runner* is a tremendously bad Amazon flick starring Gal Gadot, while *Runner* (below) stars Alan Ritchson and Owen Wilson and is a throwback to the buddy movies of the late-Eighties and Nineties. Nearly everyone on the team has mixed them up at some point.

» [ZX Spectrum] Stuart Hardy was delighted to see the ending to *The Great Escape*.

Regards,
Stuart Hardy

We're glad you finally got to see the ending of *The Great Escape*, Stuart. We hope it was worth the long wait.

Your say

Every month, Retro Gamer asks a question on social media and prints the best replies. This month we wanted to know…

What's your favourite Amiga game?

Myst & Co
Superfrog! The very first videogame I ever played, so it'll always have a special place in my heart and be my favourite Amiga game.

Nobby
There's always that one game that prompts you to finally commit to a system, and for me with the Amiga it was seeing Microprose's *Formula One Grand Prix* running on my friend's A500. It looks quaint now but, having come through the BBC/ZX/C64 era, it was 'next gen' before 'next gen' was even a thing.

Sharpworks
Benefactor. It takes the *Lemmings* concept and adds a new twist to it. Very addictive and some really charming graphics.

Alcade
Cannon Fodder, the first game I got for my Amiga with my Xmas money, and one I still love playing to this day. They were right, war has never been so much fun.

David
I spent the summer of 1995 getting my local team Stirling Albion to become champions of Europe with Rudi Voller in midfield in *SWOS*. Good times.

Beil
Lemmings – a timeless classic that plays perfectly to the strengths of the Amiga platform. Now if only I wasn't so rubbish at it!

Sonic Yoda
Turrican II probably has the better level design, but the inclusion of some invincibility frames and some knock back when you take damage in *Turrican 3* really elevates the whole experience to be one of the best action games on the system.

Rotherberger Paul
I always had a soft spot for *Nitro*, just a playable game. Pick up and play for 20 minutes, well I say 20 minutes, probably a couple of hours.

Sanny Syberfeldt
The boring and honest answer is probably *SWOS*, but as a Swede I want to highlight just how fun *Pinball Fantasies* was, and still is. It is my favourite in the series and a brilliant representation of pinball, with four fun and varied tables.

SRFC08
Sensible World Of Soccer. The greatest football game of all time. Simplistic gameplay, you can score from anywhere and it's incredibly addictive. They don't make them like that anymore.

» [Amiga] You can't go wrong with a bit of *Lemmings*. Easily one of the Amiga's best puzzle games.

retro GAMER

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PRINTED BY William Gibbons & Sons Ltd, 26 Planetary Road, Willenhall, WV13 3XT
DISTRIBUTED BY Marketforce, 5 Churchill Place, Canary Wharf, London, E14 5HU | For enquiries, please email: mfcommunications@futurenet.com | www.marketforce.co.uk
ISSN: 1742-3155

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Retro Gamer (ISSN 1742-3155, USPS XXXXX) is published monthly with an extra copy in April by Future plc, Quay House, The Ambury, Bath, BA1 1UA.

Airfreight and mailing in the USA by agent named World Container Inc., c/o BBT 150-15, 183rd St, Jamaica, NY 11413, USA.

Periodicals postage paid at Brooklyn, NY 11256.

POSTMASTER:
Send address changes to Future plc, c/o World Container Inc., c/o BBT 150-15, 183rd St, Jamaica, NY 11413, USA.

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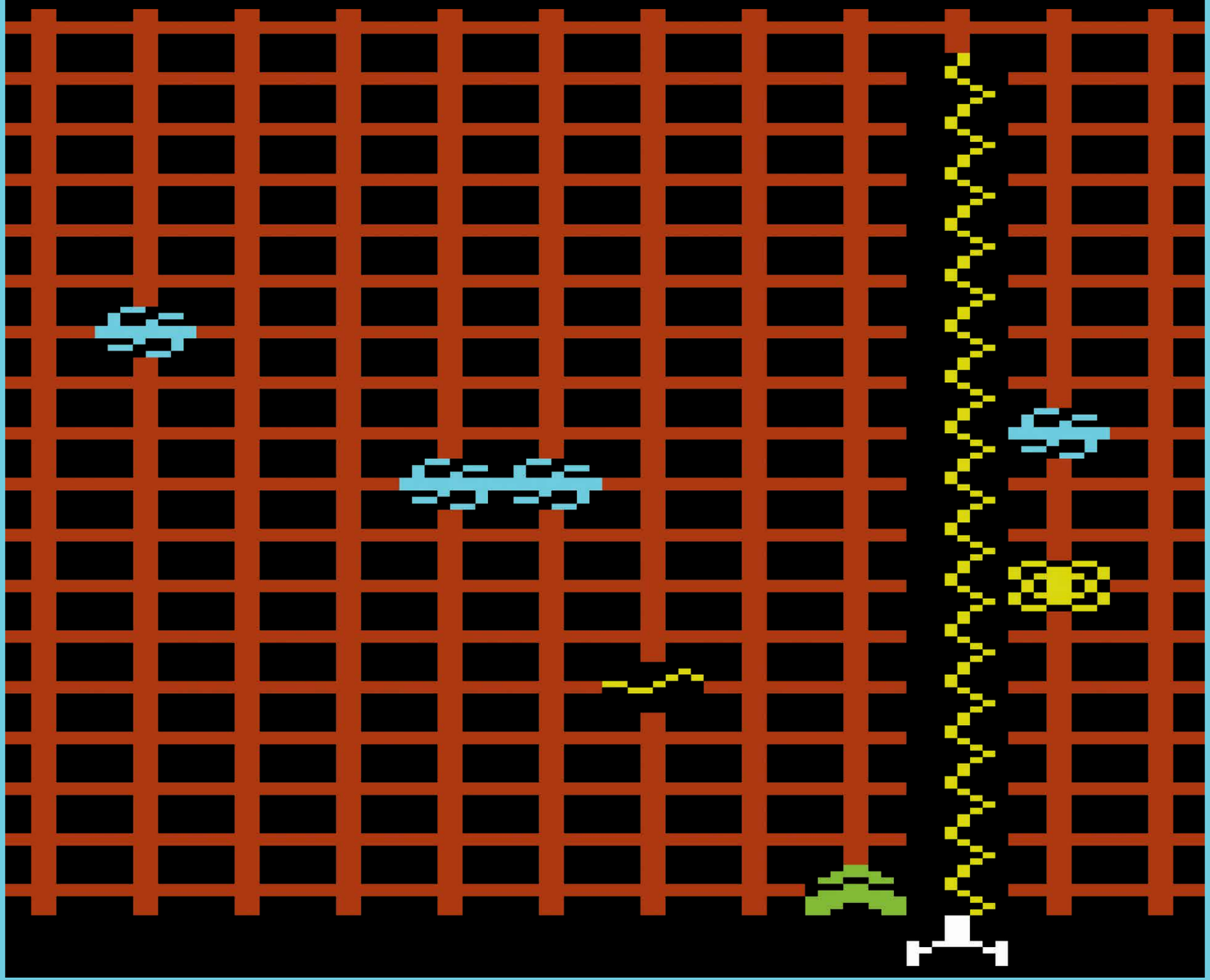

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God Of War: Chains Of Olympus

EPIC ACTION ON A MINIATURE SCALE

» RETROREVIVAL

» PSP » 2008 » READY AT DAWN

One of the things that's always impressed me with the *God Of War* games is the sheer sense of cinematic scale that they offer. Sometimes it will be used to show off the gargantuan size of an enemy that Kratos needs to defeat, but it's also utilised to highlight the series' stunning vistas or the sheer enormity of a Titan that you need to scale. In short, home consoles, in my mind, were always the ideal home of gaming's angriest protagonist and the idea of playing a Kratos adventure on the PSP felt laughable at the time. I've never been more happy to have been wrong.

While there are obvious concessions due to the PSP's small screen, the ferocity, cinematic framing and game mechanics all translated over perfectly well to Sony's first portable console. Ready At Dawn not only nailed what it felt like to be Kratos in its first *God Of War* game, but also proved that a small screen didn't mean you couldn't convey grand ideas. From the opening moments when Kratos faces off against a dangerous Basilisk, it becomes obvious that the team had done its homework and religiously studied Kratos' earlier adventures.

There are plenty of moments in *Chains Of Olympus* where the camera pulls back to show off a distant objective that Kratos must reach, or to highlight his insignificance against an imposing boss. Yes, it might not look quite as striking on that small screen, but it's all there, in all its miniature glory.

The scope of Ready At Dawn's ambitions become even more apparent if you play the game via its PS3 rerelease. The lower-textured resolutions are more obvious, but it instantly *feels* like a *God Of War* game when viewed on a big TV. It's a truly impressive game and its sequel *Ghost Of Sparta* is perhaps even better.

Chains Of Olympus offers gore, intense action, a rip-roaring story, one of the best minigames in the series and titanic, thrilling battles in the palm of your hand. What more could you ask for? ✱

ENDGAME

GAUNTLET IV
(1993, MEGA DRIVE)

» *Gauntlet* games traditionally have no ending, instead just looping back through previous dungeons once you reach a certain point. But the Quest mode in *Gauntlet IV* for the Mega Drive is different, serving up a definite – and surprising – conclusion for those who explore its dungeons

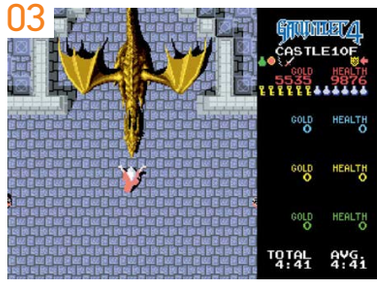
01

» Having cleared the four towers and reached the top floor of the castle, you confront and defeat the 'final boss', a deadly gold dragon. With it vanquished, a mysterious voice asks if you're ready to claim your prize of eternal youth.

02

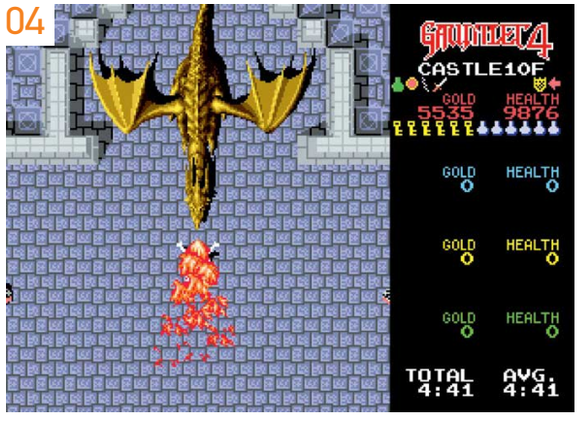
» If you select 'no' the game will end on a plaintive note. But if you choose to accept the prize, the voice will be delighted, revealing that the spell has been broken and that you are the new heir. Surprise!

03



» You are now the gold dragon. You have been stitched up, good and proper. And who's this who materialises in front of you? It's the former heir, and previous conqueror, now in human form.

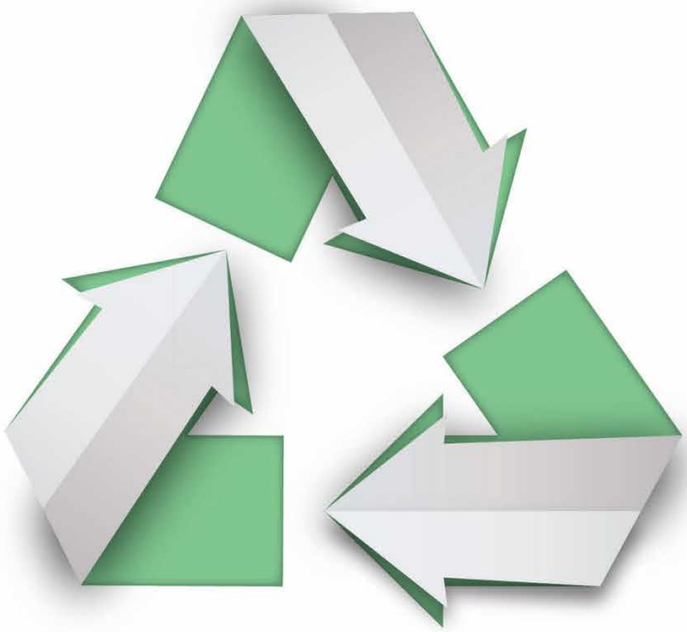
04



» The former heir is defenceless and you are full of fire, so the only thing you can do is roast him on the spot. He gladly accepts his fate, as he is now finally free from the imprisonment of eternal youth. You, however, better get used to living on the top floor of the castle.

05

» The end message reveals that many adventurers have sought the castle's treasure over the ages, but none have ever returned. You know the reason why and what the treasure really is. You also now know why the game's Quest mode is subtitled Castle Of Succession...



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